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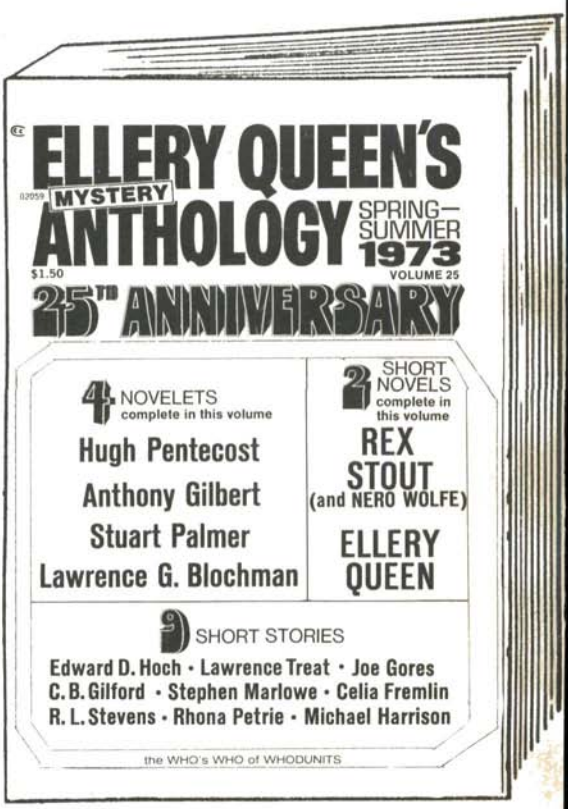

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"You can't do anything about that, Captain. You can't invent a murder where none exists."

Where none exists . . . Captain Leopold had more than the usual reasons for investigating this particular case. One reason was only 14 years old . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD PLAYS A HUNCH

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The day was sunny, with an August warmth that hung in the air like an unseen cloud. It was the sort of day when children's voices carried far in the muggy atmosphere, when the slamming of a screen door or the barking of a dog could be heard throughout the quiet suburban neighborhood surrounding Maple Street.

Out back, beyond the trees that marked the boundary of developed land, a group of boys barely into their teens stood watching while one of them fired a .22 rifle at a row of beer cans they had set up on a log. Presently the mother of the boy with the rifle appeared at the line of trees and shouted for him to stop. He did so, reluctantly, and the other youths drifted away. The boy with the rifle walked slowly back to his mother, his head hanging.

The afternoon settled into a routine of humid stillness, broken only by the rumble of an occasional delivery truck or the crying of a baby. It was nearly an hour later that the screaming started in a house on the next street, beyond the trees and across the open field.

Though the houses were some distance away, the screaming was heard quite clearly on Maple Street.

Lieutenant Fletcher took the

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call on Captain Leopold's phone, interrupting a department meeting on a recent wave of midtown muggings. Leopold, watching Fletcher's face from the corner of one eye, saw the blood drain from it.

"I'll be right home," Fletcher said and hung up. He turned to Leopold and explained. "I've got to get home, Captain. They think my kid might have killed somebody with his rifle."

"Go ahead," Leopold said. "Call me when you find out what happened."

He went on with the meeting, accepting suggestions from the other detectives and from policewoman Connie Trent, but his mind was on Fletcher. He hoped the news wasn't quite as bad as it had sounded on the phone. He and Fletcher had worked together for so many years that the troubles of one often became the worries of the other.

As soon as the meeting broke up he motioned Connie aside. "Try to find out what happened with Fletcher's son, will you? Let me know as soon as you hear anything."

"Right, Captain." Connie was tall and dark-haired, the brightest addition to Leopold's squad since Fletcher had joined it eleven years earlier. She had beauty and brains, along with a superior arrest record that she had achieved while acting as an undercover narcotics agent. Leopold enjoyed talking to her, enjoyed looking at her deep green eyes and easy smile.

Within fifteen minutes Connie was back in his office. "It's not good, Captain. A man named Chester Vogel, a high-school teacher, was found shot to death in his living room. He was killed by a single .22 bullet that came through a back window of his house. The window faces a vacant lot where Fletcher's son was firing a .22 rifle at just about the time Vogel was killed."

"Damn!" Leopold frowned at his desk. "All right," he said finally. "I'd better get out there."

"Want me to come along?"

"No, Connie. I'm going as a friend, not as a detective." But he smiled and added, "Thanks for offering."

"I'll be here if you need me."

A police car was parked in front of Fletcher's white ranch home on Maple Street. Captain Leopold had been there a few times before—once for a summer cookout in the back yard when he'd felt oddly out of place as the only outsider in a close-knit family group. But he'd always liked Fletcher's

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wife Carol, a charming intelligent woman whose only fault was her heavy smoking.

Carol saw him coming up the walk now and opened the screen door to greet him. She was short and small-boned, looking far younger than her 37 years. At that moment she might have been someone's kid sister rather than the mother of a 14-year-old boy. "Thank you for coming, Captain," she said simply.

"How are you, Carol? Is it young Mike?" He knew it was, because their other child was eight-year-old Lisa.

She nodded and pointed to the family room. Leopold went in, edging by the patrolman who stood in the doorway. Young Mike Fletcher was slumped in an armchair, staring at the floor. He did not look up as Leopold entered.

"Hello, Captain," Lieutenant Fletcher said quietly.

"What's the story?"

"I got Mike a .22 rifle last Christmas. I think I told you about it. He wasn't supposed to use it around here. This afternoon Carol caught him out in back with some other kids, shooting at beer cans. She made him come in, and then a while later she heard this screaming. Woman over on Oak Street came home to find her husband shot dead. Some of the neighbors remembered hearing the kids shooting, and the patrolman came over to find out about it."

Leopold looked questioningly at the officer in charge. "What do you think?"

"We'll run a check on the rifle, Captain, but there's not much doubt. Discharging a firearm out here is a violation. We'll have to book him for something or the guy's widow will be on our necks."

Leopold grunted. The man was a deputy sheriff, independent of the city police. He knew Leopold, of course, but there outside the city limits he wasn't impressed by detective captains. Leopold wished Fletcher had kept his family in the city, where he'd been obliged to live until the regulations for municipal employees were relaxed a few years back.

"It was an accident," Leopold pointed out. "And there were other boys involved."

"I did all the shooting," Mike said without looking up. "They were just watching. Don't bring them into it."

Leopold glanced at Lieutenant Fletcher's face and saw the torment in it. "Come on," he said to the boy. "Let's go for a walk out back. You can show me where it happened."

Mike nodded reluctantly and stood up. He was a good-

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looking boy with fashionably long hair and sideburns, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. Leopold knew him only casually, but had always liked him. They went out through the kitchen, walking across the wide back yard like casual strollers on a summer afternoon. Leopold admired the close-cropped lawn and blooming rosebushes as only an apartment dweller could. He'd never owned a home of his own, even during his brief years of marriage. Now, passing uncomfortably through middle age, he often contemplated the simple joys of life that he had missed.

"Where were you standing when you shot at the cans, Mike?"

"Beyond those trees, Captain Leopold. Our yard ends at the trees, but we all go into the empty lots to shoot and stuff."

"Didn't you know discharging a firearm out here is against the law?"

"Yeah, I guess I knew it."

Leopold followed him between trees and found himself in a great open field overgrown with weeds and scrub brush. Had it not been for the line of houses some 300 yards away on the next street, he might have imagined himself suddenly transported to the countryside.

"Some day they'll build all this up," Mike said, "put a couple of streets through, build lots of houses. It won't be the same."

"Nothing stays the same, Mike." He stooped to pick up a punctured beer can. "Was this where the cans were?"

Mike nodded. "On the log."

Leopold turned and saw Fletcher walking out to join them. In that moment he was not a detective lieutenant or even a close friend. He was only a troubled father. "Find anything?" he asked.

"Beer cans. Bullet holes. What sort of rifle was it?"

"A pump-action .22. He wasn't supposed to fire it around here. I told him, his mother told him."

Leopold stared at the distant line of houses. "That's a long way for a .22 to carry and still have the impact to kill a man." Something was gnawing at him. It was only a hunch, but it was growing. He turned to the boy. "Did you fire toward that house, Mike?"

"No. I didn't even know which was Mr. Vogel's house till the policeman pointed it out."

"You can see the patrol car in the driveway," Fletcher said, pointing out a white ranch home in the middle of the row of houses.

"Did you fire in that direction, Mike?" Leopold asked again.

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"No. At least, I don't think so."

"If you were standing here, you would have had to fire a good two feet to the left of your row of cans, and above them, to come anywhere near that house."

"I might have been wide on a few shots. I don't know."

"Let's just walk over there."

"I don't want to," Mike said.

"All of us do things we don't want to do. Come on."

Mike looked up at his father who nodded. But Fletcher stood back as the two started across the field. Perhaps he felt that his place was with his wife.

"Nice house," Leopold commented when they were almost there.

"Yeah. Oak Street is classier than Maple. I guess that's why they like that big empty lot separating us."

Leopold nodded to the pair of detectives in the living room of the sprawling home. His eyes went to the single hole where the bullet had passed through the window at the rear of the house. "A thousand-to-one chance," a detective said. "It was just bad luck, Captain."

"Seems so. Is Mrs. Vogel home?"

"I'm right here," a hoarse-voiced woman said from the kitchen. She was pale, a little overweight, and perhaps 50 years old. Once she might have been pretty, but today she was only sad-looking and alone.

"I'm Captain Leopold, Lieutenant Fletcher's superior in the city police. This is Mike Fletcher."

Mike stepped forward and tried to speak, but his voice broke when he saw the spots of blood on the white shag carpet at his feet. "No," he managed. "I didn't mean to—"

Mrs. Vogel stared at him with hard unyielding eyes. "You killed my husband," she said quietly. "I hope you rot in prison for it!" Then, turning to Leopold, she added, "Or will being a cop's son get him off?"

Before Leopold could reply, a much younger woman appeared from the kitchen and took Mrs. Vogel's arm. "Come on, Katherine. You've got to lie down. The doctor will be here soon with something to calm you."

"I am calm," Katherine Vogel replied, and indeed she seemed so. Bitter and accusing, but calm. She even glanced down at the watch on her left wrist as if to see what time it was. Nevertheless she allowed the younger woman to lead her off to the bedroom. One of the detectives looked at Leopold and shrugged.

When the young woman

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returned Leopold thanked her. She acknowledged the words with a nod and said, "I'm Linda Pearson from across the street. Just trying to help."

"She was the first one here after Mrs. Vogel found her husband," a detective explained.

Leopold nodded. "You heard her screams?"

"Yes. It was terrible. She'd been down the street talking to a neighbor and when she returned she found him dead."

"She seems to have calmed down quite a bit now."

"It's all inside. I'm afraid she'll burst with it." Linda Pearson was an attractive young woman, not more than 30, who wore her long blonde hair in twin pigtails that made her seem even younger.

"You knew Mrs. Vogel and her husband well?"

She looked away. "Just as neighbors. I didn't see much of her." She seemed reluctant to say more.

Leopold walked to the rear window and examined the bullet hole. The shot had come from outside, all right, but somehow the whole thing still bothered him. His nagging hunch was back again. "Was Mr. Vogel seated in that chair?"

"I think so," she answered. "He'd fallen onto the rug by the time I got here."

Leopold bent to examine some indentations in the shag rug. The chair seemed to have been moved several inches from its usual position. "Come on, Mike," he said, straightening up. "We'd better be getting back."

In the morning Leopold was restless and irritable. He missed Fletcher, who'd taken the day off to be with Carol and the boy. More than that, he wanted to help, but he didn't really know how. When Connie Trent, filling in for Fletcher, brought his coffee, he looked at her and said, "Damn it, Connie, I want to help Mike!"

She sat down, crossing her legs with a whisper of nylon. "What can you do?"

"That's the trouble. I keep looking for something that isn't there, trying to find proof that he didn't do it. I was awake half the night dreaming up nice neat theories. Vogel having an affair with the girl across the street, his wife finding out, seeing Mike out shooting, and doing a little shooting herself."

"It's an idea," she admitted.

"But there's not a trace of evidence to back it up."

"What about the bullet?"

"Too mashed for a ballistics check. But it was a .22 Long Rifle, the same type Mike was using."

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"What will they do to him?"

"He's a juvenile, never in trouble before, and it surely was an accident. He'll probably get off with a lecture from the judge unless Mrs. Vogel raises a stink about his being a detective's son. He did break the law by just firing the rifle. But the thing that bothers me most is the effect on the boy, and on Fletcher and Carol. The bad publicity, the civil suit for damages that Mrs. Vogel is bound to file."

"You can't do anything about that, Captain. You can't invent a murder where none exists."

"I know that, Connie."

"Not even for Fletcher."

He sighed and turned toward the window. "And yet, I have a hunch about Vogel's death—a feeling that the whole thing is just too pat. The chair he was sitting in looked as if it had been moved. Katherine Vogel glanced at her watch once while I was there. Why would a woman whose husband has just been killed be so interested in what time it was?" He paused a moment. "More important, is there substance to any of this or am I merely concerned about Fletcher and his son?"

Connie had no answer, and she gave none.

Leopold parked his car at the corner of Oak Street and walked across to a yard where a man was mowing his lawn. It was late afternoon, almost dinnertime, and in some yards families were preparing to eat outdoors. The odor of charcoal cooking hung heavy in the air.

"You're Bob Aarons?" Leopold asked the man with the power mower.

"That's right." He switched off the mower and frowned.

"I wonder if you could answer a few questions. I'm Captain Leopold, investigating the death of Chester Vogel down the street."

"Terrible thing," the man said, his face relaxing a bit. "I've been a friend of theirs for years." He was tall and middle-aged, with a ready smile when he cared to use it.

"I understand Mrs. Vogel was up here talking with you when it happened."

"About that time, I guess, though the shooting might have stopped before she arrived. We chatted a few minutes and then she went on home. A few minutes later I heard her screams. I reached the house just after Mrs. Pearson."

Leopold nodded. "Tell me, how did Vogel get along with his wife? Any trouble there?"

"Not that I know of." The smile vanished. "It was the kid on Maple Street that shot him,

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you know. It wasn't Katherine Vogel."

"I didn't say it was."

"Just because the kid's father is a cop is no reason to let him off the hook."

"Certainly not." Leopold could see he'd get nowhere here. "Thanks for your time, Mr. Aarons. I'll be going now."

He turned to leave, but Aarons called him back. "Look, you might talk to Linda Pearson about it."

"What could she tell me?"

The man's face was blank. "Ask her."

"Come on, Mr. Aarons."

The man stared down at the grass. "In the house, right after I got there, Mrs. Pearson said Katherine had killed him. That was before we knew what really happened, of course."

"Of course. Thanks, Mr. Aarons. I'll talk to her."

Linda Pearson came to the door at his first ring. He identified himself and reminded her of their meeting the previous afternoon, but she still seemed reluctant to let him in. "My husband's at the funeral parlor with Katherine Vogel. I'm alone with the baby."

"I'll only take a few minutes."

"Oh, very well!" She unlatched the screen door. "A woman can't be too careful these days."

Her house was a duplicate of the Vogel place across the street, though the décor carried out a more contemporary theme. "You were the first one over there after Katherine Vogel screamed, I believe."

"That's right. Mr. Aarons was right behind me."

"I was just talking to him. He said when you first saw the body you thought Mrs. Vogel had killed him."

"I—that was in the heat of the moment. It didn't mean anything."

"Sometimes the truth comes out in the heat of the moment."

"That wasn't the truth. The boy on the next street killed him."

"Why did you think it might have been Katherine Vogel?"

"I don't know." She glanced away, searching for the right words.

"Mrs. Pearson, forgive me, but were you having an affair with Chester Vogel?"

"Certainly not!" Her eyes blazed with fury. "You're sounding just like her!"

"Yes?" He smiled slightly. "More words in the heat of the moment?"

She started to turn away, then faced him again. "All right, I'll tell you. Katherine Vogel thought we were having an affair. She accused him of it

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and warned me to stay away from him. But I swear to you, there wasn't a word of truth in it! She's a suspicious old bitch who minds everybody else's business. He told me once that she threatened to kill him if she caught him fooling around."

The fury of her attack surprised Leopold. "Do you know if Vogel owned a gun of any kind?" he asked.

She nodded. "A target pistol. I saw it once. He kept it in the basement."

"A .22?"

"I don't know that much about guns."

Maybe, Leopold thought. Just maybe his hunch was beginning to pay off. "Thank you, Mrs. Pearson. You've been a big help."

Upstairs the baby started to cry.

Leopold stopped for a sandwich and then drove over to the funeral parlor in the early evening. It was an imposing colonial structure in keeping with middle-class suburban architecture. Leopold was surprised to find Fletcher lingering near the doorway as if awaiting some call.

"I thought I should come over," he explained. "I tried to get Mike to come, too, but he wouldn't."

"It's a terrible thing for him," Leopold said. His eyes were scanning the assembled mourners. "Is Linda Pearson's husband still around?"

"Dark blue suit. Straight ahead."

Harry Pearson was tall and virile, if somewhat older than his youthful wife. When Leopold motioned him aside to ask about Katherine Vogel, he drew in his breath and answered with some anger, "This is hardly the place for it, Captain."

Leopold glanced at the flower-draped coffin and agreed. "All right, let's go outside."

It was still daylight as they strolled across the blacktopped parking area behind the building. Harry Pearson swatted at a mosquito and asked, "Now, what was it you wanted?"

"What were Mrs. Vogel's relations with her husband?"

"Good, as far as I know."

"I've heard differently. I've heard she was suspicious of him, jealous of other women, and that she even threatened to kill him."

He squinted at Leopold. "Have you been talking to my wife?"

"Among others."

"Well, there's no truth in it. Katherine Vogel is a fine woman. A detective's son killed Chester, and there's nothing

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else you can make out of it."

Lieutenant Fletcher came out the back door at that moment, and Leopold knew he'd heard Pearson's last sentence. Fletcher merely nodded and kept going to his car. Leopold watched him in silence and then said, "All right, Mr. Pearson. Sorry to have taken your time."

He turned and followed Fletcher, catching him at the car. "Want to stop for a beer?"

Fletcher turned to him, his eyes pained. "Captain, I know what you're trying to do, believe me. But it's no good. We can't make a murder case out of this. Mike killed him, that's all there is to it."

"Mike says he didn't fire any shots in that direction. I believe him, Fletcher."

"Then what happened?"

"She heard the shooting, got her husband's target pistol out of the basement, and shot him through the window herself."

"Without any neighbors seeing her?"

Leopold knew he was being unreasonable. "All right," he agreed finally. "Let me talk to ballistics again in the morning."

Fletcher managed a weak smile. "Sure, Captain. I appreciate everything you're trying to do. So does Carol."

Leopold nodded. They shook hands like two old friends who had just encountered each other briefly. Then Fletcher got into his car and drove away.

In the morning Leopold went down to ballistics and talked to Sergeant Wolfer, a grumpy little man who was an expert at what he did. "No chance for identification, Captain," he said immediately. "The slug was too badly mashed."

"But it was a .22, the same as Mike Fletcher was firing?"

"That's right—a .22 Long Rifle."

"A rifle bullet?"

The little man sighed. "Come on, Captain! Do I need to lecture you on ballistics this morning? Most .22 rifles and target pistols use the same ammunition. The majority of target pistols made today can fire .22 Long Rifle slugs."

Leopold persisted. "What about penetration? Mike's bullet would have traveled nearly three hundred yards."

"The bullet in Vogel's head penetrated only about an inch—just far enough to get mashed and drive some bone splinters into his brain. I'm reading from the autopsy report now."

"Is that consistent with a shot from Mike's gun?"

"Within reasonable limits.

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Maybe there was a little extra powder in the cartridge."

"A .22 target pistol fired at close range would have penetrated deeper?"

"Maybe, maybe not."

"Damn it, Wolfer, I'm trying to conduct an investigation!"

"And I'm trying to help you. Many things can cause a bullet to lose penetrating power. The cartridges might have been old and damp, for one thing. Or the bullet could have been fired through something."

"Like a pillow, to deaden the sound of the shot?"

Wolfer nodded. "Like that."

"If somebody had a target pistol down in the basement for a long time, with old ammunition, and brought it up and fired it through a pillow, would it penetrate about the same distance as a bullet from a .22 rifle fired nearly three hundred yards away?"

Sergeant Wolfer thought about it. "Maybe, maybe not."

Leopold sighed and went back upstairs to his office. It was going to be that sort of day. Perhaps Fletcher was right. Perhaps he should forget the whole thing.

Young Mike Fletcher was waiting with his father in Leopold's office. "Captain, my dad wanted me to come see you," he said with hesitation.

"Sure, Mike. What is it?"

"He told me what you're trying to do for me and all that, and I sure appreciate it, but—"

"But what?"

"Well, I told you I didn't remember shooting in that direction."

"Yes?"

"It wasn't true, Captain. I do remember. I remember the exact shot that did it. One of the kids accidentally hit my arm, and my aim went way off. I remember praying that it wouldn't hit anyone. It was high and to the left, right toward Vogel's house."

"I see," Leopold said.

Fletcher cleared his throat. "I thought you should know, Captain."

"Yes. Of course."

"Thanks again for what you tried to do for me," Mike said.

Leopold nodded. He waited until the boy left and then he said, "Get me some coffee, will you, Fletcher? I missed you yesterday. Connie had to do my running for me."

"Sure, Captain."

When they were settled over coffee Leopold asked, "When's Vogel's funeral?"

"Tomorrow morning."

Leopold sipped his coffee. It should have been over, but it wasn't. "Why did Mrs. Vogel glance at her wrist watch when I was there?"

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"You're still on it, aren't you? Even after talking to Mike?"

"I just want to know why the time interested her so much at that moment, with her husband dead."

"Maybe the time didn't interest her."

"Why else does someone look at their watch?"

Fletcher thought about that. "To see if it's going?"

Leopold sat up straight. "Of course! Why didn't I think of that? I forgot to take my watch off on the pistol range one day, and when I was firing left-handed the shock of the recoil stopped it."

"But why would a right-handed person fire a gun left-handed?"

"If she was holding something else in her right hand, Fletcher—something like a pillow to muffle the shot!"

"Captain—"

Leopold got to his feet. "I'd better talk to Mrs. Vogel once more."

She answered the door dressed in black and looking as grim and defensive as he remembered her. "Captain Leopold, isn't it? I understand you've been questioning my neighbors."

"Only routine," he said. "May I come in?"

"Routine when a detective's son shoots somebody?"

"May I come in?" he repeated.

"For a moment. I have to be leaving for the funeral parlor."

He followed her into the living room, carefully avoiding the stains on the white rug. He noticed that the window had been repaired, with the fresh pane of glass still bearing the window company's sticker. He walked close enough to see the name: Empire Glass Company.

"They fixed it this morning, if that's what you're looking at."

"Fast work." His eyes had gone to the wall opposite the window, to a spot that had been hidden behind the chair on his previous visit. He could see a mark as if something had chipped the paint.

"Since when are city police concerned with a suburban crime, Captain Leopold?"

He ignored her question as he examined the wall. "Mrs. Vogel, I'll admit this started out only as a hunch, but it's getting to be more than that now. Mike Fletcher's bullet could have broken your window and hit the wall right here, leaving this mark before it fell, spent of all power, to the rug."

"That mark was caused a month ago when I tipped over a table while cleaning."

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"I think you saw your opportunity, Mrs. Vogel, and you took it. Perhaps your husband even kidded about how the bullet could have killed him if he'd been sitting in his favorite chair. Somehow you kept him from phoning the police right away, maybe saying you'd call the boy's parents first. Then you went down to the basement and got out his old .22 target pistol."

"Chester got rid of that long ago."

He ignored the interruption and went on. "You shot him through the head with it, muffling the sound with a pillow held in your right hand. Later, while I was here, you glanced at the wrist watch on your left hand to make sure the pistol's recoil hadn't stopped it."

"Captain, if you repeat those charges I'll sue you for every cent you own!"

"That isn't much," Leopold said with a grim smile. "I'm only concerned about the boy, Mrs. Vogel. I don't want him going through life thinking he killed a man."

"Get out of my house. I've listened to you long enough."

Leopold felt a wave of helplessness wash over him. There was no way to prove it, no way even to prove to himself that his hunch was the truth. "What about the chair? You moved it to line up with the bullet hole in the wall, and now you've moved the chair back."

"Is it a crime to move one's furniture around?"

"Where's the broken window?"

"The glass company took it. There's no plot, Captain. It's all in your mind—every bit of it!"

And perhaps it was. That was the damnable part of it—perhaps she was right. "All right," he said finally. "I'll be going."

She followed him to the door and slammed it behind him. He stood on the stoop for a moment, feeling old, and then started down the walk to his car. At least he could check on the glass. If he was going to do anything about Katherine Vogel, he'd need the windowpane to line up the bullet hole with the mark on the wall.

He drove over to the Empire Glass Company, a low cinderblock building in a nearby shopping plaza. The man at the counter remembered the Vogel job. "Sure, I replaced it just this morning."

"She said you took the old window," Leopold told the man. "Did you?"

"Yeah, it's in the back. Heck, the bullet hole was just in one corner. We can cut it up for small panes."

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"I think I'll want that window," Leopold said. Then another thought struck him. "When did Mrs. Vogel call you to fix it? She didn't waste any time, did she?"

"No, the call came in day before yesterday, just after it happened, I guess. Only it was the guy that called, not her."

Something churned in Leopold's stomach. "Guy? What guy?"

"The husband, Mr. Vogel. The one that died. I talked to him myself."

"You're telling me it was Chester Vogel who called to report the broken window?"

"Sure."

Leopold spoke very quetly. "But how could he have done that if he was killed by the same bullet that broke the window?"

The man shrugged. "I didn't read the details. I just knew he was dead."

"I think you'd better come with me," Leopold said. "Right now."

When Katherine Vogel opened the door Leopold said simply, "I just found out what your husband was doing while you were in the basement looking for his target pistol."

Her eyes went from Leopold to the repairman. Leopold could see from her sagging face that it was all over.

"Q"

CRIMINALIMERICK

THE CAPTAIN

by D. R. BENSEN

He's rather more plodding than bold;
He's not very young or quite old;
But for making the scene
Using police routine,
You can't beat Ed D. Hoch's Leopold.

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a NEW crime story by

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

Do you like reunion stories? Here is one about the Twenty-fifth Reunion of the Fighting 599th and how the truth came out about Big Joe and why Big Joe would kill any former buddy who recognized him . . . Join the ex-dogfaces and listen . .

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BIG JOE?

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The Twenty-fifth Reunion of the Fighting 599th was very much like the twentieth reunion except that the survivors were fewer, whiter of thatch, and wider of girth. The bourbon disappeared more slowly and more bald heads nodded over the post-prandial brandy. However, the same "whatever happened to So-and-so" queries still popped up regularly. And when ex-Staff Sergeant Antonini stirred in his wheel chair to say "I never did believe that bunk about Big Joe Josephs dying of pneumonia in Paris. Hasn't anybody ever heard what really happened to Joe?"

This was my cue to stand up. I just happened to have the tape-recorded answer to the sergeant's question in my pocket.

For the benefit of nonveterans of the 599th I will explain that 25 years ago I was Second Lieutenant Mike Lubin, Public Information Officer for the outfit. I had been a reporter for the Sacramento *Bee* when I was drafted, and after World War II I went back to France to work on the Paris *Herald.* It was during my years on the *Herald* that Gisèle gave me the answer to the sergeant's question, but with the understanding that it was to be a secret between us as long as Corporal Bill Monday was alive.

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I wrote the story as soon as I learned it, hoping to peddle it to an American magazine when Monday died; but when it began to look as if he might outlive me, I read it into a tape recorder to be played at the 599th Reunion after *my* death. This will explain whatever reportorial style the tape may have. Anyhow, Monday died a few months before the Twenty-fifth Reunion, so I played the tape for the ex-dogfaces assembled. Here it is:

Gisèle recognized Bill Monday the moment he stepped into the bistro although it had been eight years—or was it nine?—since she had seen him, and she had never seen him in civvies. He did not see her movement of panic when she dropped a glass, and when she straightened up from behind the bar she was facing the other way.

It was long past midnight but the bistro was still crowded—Monday was the day the house bought a drink for every regular—so she managed to keep busy at the far end of the long zinc-covered bar. She could watch his reflection in the polished chrome of the coffee boiler, however, and she dreaded the moment when she would have to serve him.

"*Monsieur desire?*" she asked finally with impersonal politeness.

"Gisèle! Don't you remember me? I'm Bill Monday!" He held out his arms.

She held out her hand and tried to make her smile friendly.

"I guess I've changed," he said, "but you haven't. You're younger and more beautiful than ever."

"Of course I remember! You're Corporal Bill. What a joy to see you again." He hadn't aged a day. He never would, probably. He would always be the perpetual boy, wide-eyed and gawky, clean-cut and decent, shyly self-confident. She had once thought that all Americans were perpetual boys; but Big Joe, who was asleep upstairs, proved the contrary. Joe had aged 20 years in the last five. At least she hoped Joe was asleep. If he should suddenly awake and come wandering downstairs for a hot grog . . . A cold shudder ran through her.

"Beer?" she asked Corporal Bill. "Or what was it you used to drink? A Picon citron! You see, I do remember. When did you get to Paris?"

"A few hours ago. I had a little trouble finding the place. The 599th had a reunion last year and one of the boys told me he'd seen you, and that you

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had your own place now. He said you told him about Joe. Too bad. What did Joe die of?"

"Pneumonia. He was too sick to join your regiment the day you left. He died next day." She looked at the clock on the wall. She prayed, prayed hard that Joe would sleep soundly until she woke him up three hours from now.

"We all thought Joe went AWOL to stay with you," said Bill Monday. "Look, why don't you close up this joint and let's go out and paint the town."

"Not tonight," Gisèle said uneasily. She thought: Not tonight—or ever. Joe would kill you, the way he killed that American who recognized him and tried to shake him down for blackmail. She never knew the American's name, but she helped Joe bury him on the Meudon Woods, just off the road to Versailles. That's the least she could do for a man who had given up everything for her—country, family, security, even his identity . . .

"Another Picon, Gisèle honey."

"Just one more. You look tired, Corporal Bill. You must go and get some sleep. Tomorrow I will call your hotel and we will have dinner together. You remember the Golden Trout near the Central Markets?"

"Do I? Where we ate onion soup and sole Marguery and those filet mignons you called tournedos. We'll eat the same thing. And drink the same wine. I remember—it was Corton. Where's that Picon?"

"The last one." She glanced at the clock again. She thought she heard Joe stirring upstairs. "Then you must go and rest yourself, Corporal Bill."

Rest yourself? Save your life. If Joe came down now he would recognize you and kill you the same way he killed the other American—in the back room with morphine in your drink. When Joe severed connections with the U.S. Army he stole a gross of the morphine Syrettes that every G.I. carried into combat with him for emergency use. Each Syrette contained only enough morphine to dull the pain until the medics could find the wounded on the battlefield, but only enough multiplied by ten equals what? And Gisèle knew where Joe had hidden the Syrettes. She had counted them after they had buried the American. There were ten missing.

Joe and Bill Monday had both been Gisèle's suitors just after the Nazi surrender. Bill had been sweet and sentimental. Joe had been direct and intense and perhaps a little brutal. When the 599th had

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been ordered to the Far East to engage in the Japanese war, Bill had asked her to wait for him; when he came back he would marry her. She had laughed, a little tearfully, because she was a realist. She had read Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* and she had seen *Madame Butterfly* at the Opera-Comique. She told Bill that when—or if—he came back there would be plenty of time to talk about marriage.

Big Joe Josephs had asked her nothing. He simply returned to Paris the day after the 599th left, having deserted on the way to Marseilles. She must have loved Joe then because she was genuinely glad to see him and she worried about him until she got a friend in the Maquis to make false identity papers for him. He ceased being Joe Josephs and became Geo Peyrac, husband of Gisèle Peyrac.

For five years while the Black Market held up, Joe-Geo was a big-shot dealer in American cigarettes, nylons, soap, and gasoline. By the time scarce commodities became plentiful again, he had made enough money to buy the little bistro for Gisèle. Since then he hadn't done much except tend bar occasionally, drink too much Pernod, and brood over the danger of being recognized by a former buddy, an offense in Joe's book punishable by death . . .

"Another Picon, Gisèle honey."

"No more, Bill." The bitter-sweet of Amer Picon would cover the bitterness of morphine. "You must go now and rest."

"Now listen, Gisèle honey. I've come all the way to Paris to see you, and you want to put me out. You told me when I came back we'd talk about marriage. Why, I'm going to take you to the States with me. Tomorrow we'll go to the Consulate and start getting you processed."

"Silly." Gisèle couldn't keep her eyes away from the clock. She could almost see the minute hand moving.

The night people were still coming in: the baker's delivery boy with a basket of hot croissants; two old women with black shawls and gray mustaches folding morning newspapers on the marble-topped tables while they sipped glasses of steaming coffee; a pair of gaudy *belles de nuit* taking a break from the bordello around the corner. The mixed aromas of fresh rolls, fresh printer's ink, and stale musk filled the air.

It would soon be daylight and Bill Monday showed no

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sign of leaving. The last drink was pushing him from mellow to maudlin. He was telling Gisèle everything that had happened since the 599th had been shipped to the Orient. He had gone back to college on a G.I. scholarship. He was just getting started as a lawyer when he was recalled and sent to Korea for a year. He had then made a fresh start and was doing all right—in fact, he was doing fine. He was now on his way to Switzerland on business.

"Gisèle honey, I don't blame you for not answering my letters. You couldn't believe I was really serious. But now—"

"Please." Gisèle turned to serve another customer. She had just heard the sound she dreaded—the familiar thump on the floor above. Joe was getting out of bed. It would take him another three or four minutes to shuffle into the bathroom and get one eye open. In five or six minutes he would come down for a coffee spiked with *vieux marc* to open the other eye. She wondered if Bill Monday could read the dismay that must be written on her face.

At that moment the street door opened and Pierre the garbage man lurched in. Pierre was given to lurching a little on Mondays because of the Parisian custom of the house buying a drink for every habitué every Monday; there were twelve bistros on Pierre's route. Pierre's eyes seemed to stare in opposite directions as if controlled by the ends of his formidable red mustache, one end of which pointed northeast, the other southwest. Even at a distance his effluvia eclipsed the fragrance of warm croissants.

Gisèle suddenly leaned across the zinc counter and threw her arms around him. "Pierre, mon chéri, you are late." And she kissed him.

The astounded garbage man responded with alacrity and enthusiasm.

"Corporal Bill, meet my husband Pierre," said Gisèle.

Bill Monday backed away as he shook the big odorous hand. The eyes that sought Gisèle's were those of a whipped dog. He tried a smile but it didn't quite come off.

"I guess nine years *is* a pretty long time," he said. "I didn't quite realize—"

"Corporal Bill," Gisèle interrupted. She could hear the water running in the bathroom overhead. "Will you have dinner with Pierre and me before you leave Paris?"

"Sure, sure." Monday fumbled with his billfold, fished out a sheaf of dog-eared French currency, and dropped it on the bar. "I'll phone you."

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Gisèle watched him weaving a little as he disappeared into the predawn grayness; her knees had turned to aspic. She put out a hand to steady herself against the cashier's high stool and breathed deeply. She was so relieved that she was barely aware of the dull ache, the wistful pang of regret that welled up inside her. She was sure now that Corporal Bill would never try to see her again, and she was glad. Or was she? Yes, she was glad—for him He was really a sweet guy.

When Joe came down a few minutes later he looked at her curiously. "What's the matter with your eyes?" he asked "They're all red."

Gisèle sniffled. "I think I'm catching cold," she replied.

The tape came to an end. The silence lasted for several seconds after I turned off the recorder. Finally one cynical ex-dogface spoke up.

"You're holding out on us," he said. "That can't be the end of the story."

I assured him that it was the end of the story as far as Bill Monday was concerned.

Ex-Staff Sergeant Antonini was stirring in his wheelchair again. "But that wasn't Bill's story. It was Gisèle's," he said. "You stinker! You were seeing the gal yourself."

"Okay, men," I said. "I guess you're entitled to hear the epilogue."

I explained that I had been on the lobster trick at the *Herald* the night that Bill Monday came back to renew his ties with Paris and, he thought, with Gisèle Peyrac. He knew I was on the *Herald*, so after the business of being introduced to the garbage man who was Gisèle's husband he came around to the Rue de Berri looking for commiseration. He was quite confused and upset. He was also pretty squiffed and determined to stay that way until he could decide whether to be broken-hearted or angry, or just to laugh at himself.

Always ready to accommodate a visiting fireman or an ex-comrade in arms, I took Bill up the street to a bistro where our printers hung out. There we proceeded to become well-lubricated male chauvinist pigs. Every five minutes Bill would repeat, "I just can't get over it. A garbage man! A doll like that!"

I tried to convince him that Gisèle was probably joking, but he believed what he had seen with his own eyes. There was no doubt about it. She had kissed Pierre!

I knew Gisèle slightly as did most serious drinkers of the 599th in those hectic mid-'40s.

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She was our favorite barmaid, and the oasis where she held forth was for all intents and purposes the regimental bistro. Bill Monday's story didn't make sense to me, so when he went on to Switzerland I decided to check. On my next night off I went around to her bistro.

The minute I walked in I knew something was wrong. The big handsome carefree brunette she once was had become a tense, haunted automaton. I watched her jerky movements as she served people at the other end of the bar. When she turned toward me I saw that she had a magnificent shiner that the most skillful makeup could not hide. When she saw me she stopped in her tracks. Then, as she confirmed my identity in her own mind, I thought she was going to faint.

When she got hold of herself, she came to my end of the bar and said, scarcely moving her lips, "*Va-t-en!* Get out!"

"Look, Gisèle, I only want—"

"I know what you want." She picked up two dirty glasses from the bar without looking at me. She was obviously terrified of something. She spoke in a murmur. "I know who you are and where you work. I'll telephone you at your newspaper. I promise. Now get out. Quickly!"

I got out. It was hard to disobey an order dictated by such manifest terror.

For several days I waited for her promised call with nervous expectations. Then I decided she had been stalling me. After three weeks or so, when I had almost forgotten about her promise, she called and asked me to meet her in an obscure little café in Montmartre, near the Moulin de la Galette.

She got there first. I didn't recognize her when I came in. She was wearing mourning, complete with black hat and black veil. Her right arm was in a sling. And she now had two magnificent black eyes.

She seemed relaxed and greeted me with a big smile. She was sitting at a table drinking some brown apéritif—Amer Picon, as it turned out.

She first swore me to secrecy for as long as Bill Monday was alive. Then she told me the story as I dictated it on the tape. When she had finished, I asked her how she and Big Joe Josephs were making out these days.

"Oh, Big Joe is dead. I buried him yesterday—a first-class funeral with the horses wearing black plumes and blankets with Joe's initials in silver on their backs."

I asked her what Joe died of.

"Pneumonia," she said, just

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as she had said many years before when he had deserted from the 599th.

"And you believed her?" asked the regimental cynic, who I understand was doing very well with a string of funeral homes of his own, and a privately owned cemetery.

"Why not?" I replied. "The police apparently did not question the cause of Joe's death. Of course the police may not have been aware of Big Joe's stock of stolen morphine —or that Gisèle knew where Joe had hidden it. And I certainly did not make a personal count of how many Syrettes there were left at the time of Joe's death."

"Was that all she wanted to see you about," asked ex-Sergeant Antonini from his wheel chair, "to tell you that Big Joe had finally kicked the bucket for real?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "She wanted to know how to get in touch with Bill Monday. She wanted to write to him."

"And you told her?"

"No."

And that is really the end of the story. Maybe I should have given her Bill's address. She would have taken good care of him. I heard she sold her bistro and bought a little piece of land in her native Périgord, some place not far from Bergerac. I understand she runs a farm, complete with pigs trained to dig up truffles for her.

But I had hesitated to give her Bill's address as long as she didn't tell me what happened to the remainder of Joe's morphine Syrettes. I thought it best to let sleeping dogfaces lie.

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"By now I was beginning to realize just how powerful the big-lie technique could be"...

LIFE STORY

by HASKELL BARKIN

"Incidentally, Madison House bought my life story. They're publishing it this spring. You can just imagine some of the tales I'll be telling."

Well, my little lie hit Elvira right between those famous eyes. It took every ounce of her acting ability (she has at least an ounce and a half) to answer, "How wonderful, Marjorie. All the men in your life must be trembling in their boots."

"A few women, too," I said pointedly. Elvira and I have shared a good many intimate secrets since we were both ingenues.

"I hope you'll be kind to me."

"I always am, Elvie. After all, one must treasure one's friends."

Did I call her a friend? Well, most people in this town still think we are. But friendship rarely lasts between two people if one makes it big and the other, around just as long, still has to hustle for a part in a dull situation comedy by listening to the problems of the producer whose wife doesn't understand him.

Which is what I was doing at the party that night when Elvira burst into the conversation. Benny Lipton, on his fourth drink and feeling very, very cosy toward yours truly, was saying how rare it was to find someone like me who empathized so warmly.

I was just about to maneuver the conversation to the pilot he was casting. Suddenly Elvira made our cosy pair a trio and dominated Benny's attention with her no-bra look and her insistence that he join a few people who were going to her place for a screening of her latest film.

So I popped out with my lie, which I knew would devastate Elvira. You see, she'd been trying to get her own autobiography published for the past six months and not a soul was interested. Madison House, I

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happened to know, was the most recent to reject it. Poor Elvie, when she gets a bee in her bonnet it drives her up the wall if she can't get her own way.

"Marjorie, that's wonderful news," she said. "Isn't it, Benny? Now don't think I'm snide or anything, but I just can't see why they'd want your life. I mean, for all your incredible talent you just aren't that well known."

"I have been around though, and what I wrote about some people apparently sounded shocking enough to sell books. I understand they're planning a massive advertising campaign."

"We'll have lunch sometime soon and you can tell me all about it. Promise?"

And off she swept, dragging Benny Lipton after her. Well, my news shook her up no matter how cool she sounded. It was almost worth losing my cosy mood with Benny. I decided to phone him Monday to try and salvage the part, and was headed across the room for a certain casting director, when suddenly Benny reappeared. He told me with great amusement that Elvira was now loudly and angrily putting me and my character through the shredder. He came back, he said, because Elvira's attitude offended him, and besides he had to talk to me about something.

The billiard room was empty, so we went in there to shut out the sounds of the party. I was so eager for a detailed account of what Elvie was saying that I forgot to ask why he wanted this tête-à-tête.

We both laughed as he parodied her. Then all of a sudden Benny grew serious.

"Honey," he said, "this autobiography of yours, is there anything in it about Susan?"

Susan was his wife and a sometime friend of mine. It was an open secret that before they got married she was a Las Vegas showgirl who also had a little free enterprise going on the side.

I was intending to let Benny in on my joke. But he was getting a little damp across the brow, so I decided to play along and see what developed. The evening was starting to be kind of fun.

"Susan's name never appears," I told him.

"I should've figured," he said, relieved. "But you know."

"Of course I did write about a girl who's a lot like her. But I made sure there's absolutely no connection."

"How much like her?"

"Hey, if it makes you uncomfortable I'll cut the entire episode."

"You'd really do that?"

"There's plenty of other

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material, I promise you. But in any case I'd certainly never want to hurt two people I love as much as you and Susan."

Benny's gratitude was boundless. Then somehow we got on the subject of his new pilot and he offered me the part before I was able to suggest it. He even promised to make it bigger if the show was picked up by a sponsor.

How about that?

A second miracle occurred the next day when my soon-to-be ex-husband telephoned, the first time we'd spoken in six months.

"No sense in us not being friends," he said ever so casually.

"No sense at all. Provided we get certain financial matters settled."

Namely the alimony, you tight-fisted creep.

"Marj, I realize how immature I've been about this whole mess, and I want to make things right. How about having lunch with me?"

"Fine."

"Incidentally, I hear they're publishing your autobiography."

"Could be."

"Congratulations. Maybe I can play myself when it hits the flicks."

"Why would you want such an unsympathetic role?"

"Don't you have any kind words for me?"

"Should I?"

"We had some good times."

"Ah, but scandal is what sells books."

"You telling about my drug arrest?"

"Lover, these are the 1970s. You won't be hurt by that dreary business. Really, it all seems so innocent nowadays."

"Sure. I guess you're right. See you about one?"

By two we were the dearest of friends, reliving happy times together, laughing about the awful times, and assuring each other how much the marriage had matured us.

I waited to see how soon he'd bring up my autobiography again. It came just after he promised to make a divorce settlement that was generous beyond my hopes. So naturally when he suggested that one old friend doesn't tell tales about another old friend, what could I do but agree?

Poor book. It was being shrunk down to nothing.

By now I was beginning to realize just how powerful the big-lie technique could be. Marjorie, dear thing, I told myself, why wait for them to come to you? Your literary escapade is obviously all over this wicked town by now, thanks to sweet Elvira. There

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are so many people who have so much to hide. So many people who would love to hire you.

First thing Monday I called my agent to tell him my price had doubled.

"What's this about a book?" he said. "I never heard anything about any book."

"Personal contact, Bob. But don't feel left out. I expect to have a very good year from now on."

"Is the deal finalized? How much you getting?"

"Plenty."

"Look, why don't you shoot me over a copy of the manuscript? Maybe I can get things moving on an adaptation."

"Oh, lots of time for that."

"You talk about me?"

Well, I agreed to leave out the unsavory aspects of certain transactions he'd been involved in. And he agreed to rent me his Malibu house for the summer at far less than he'd been asking. Dear sweet Bob.

By Thursday I had a delicious role in Hank Simpson's first movie since he won that Oscar last year for best direction.

Finally the call came that I wanted most. I knew that as soon as Elvira's analyst got her calmed down to where she was thinking rationally again she'd fall in line. After all, Elvira never was exactly a convent girl.

We had a swim in her pool and at last over cocktails she brought up The Subject.

"You must be tremendously excited about selling your life story."

"Oh, it's done wonders for my morale. And, Elvie, I hope you won't be angry with me. But I did include that little episode about those blue movies you made way back in the dark ages. When we were all taking bottles back to the store for rent money."

"Isn't that asking for trouble, darling?"

"I thought so. But my editor said there wouldn't be any legal problems as long as someone could come up with an actual print. Once he said that, I realized a star's reputation could actually be helped by the revelation of a sinful past. I mean, after all, you were a pioneer—in blue movies, I mean."

She smiled one of those famous smiles. But I'd get my satisfaction. You see, I didn't want any favors from Elvie. I just wanted to pay her back for every bitchy remark she'd aimed at me over the years.

"Tell me the truth," I said. "Should I have been more discreet? You know the last thing I want to do is hurt you."

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Just ask me the favor of deleting it, dear Elvie. That's all I want from my so-superior ex-friend.

"Marjorie, darling, whatever you want to do is perfectly all right with me."

And she sat coolly at the edge of the pool, unruffled and arrogant as ever. Still the great lady!

"Of course the book will have illustrations," I said. "My editor wanted to show a still from one of those awful movies of yours, but I really couldn't go that far. Now, since you don't care, I'll tell him to go ahead."

"Do."

"Is there a favorite scene you'd like to select?"

"Any publicity, as they say, is good publicity."

At that moment I realized how much I truly hated Elvira for always doing the duchess act for my benefit.

"By the way," she said, "that editor you rely on so much—not George Furness by any chance?"

"No."

"But it is, of course, Madison House. I remember you said distinctly that it's Madison House."

Elvira's chattering set my teeth on edge. I felt like screaming or scratching at her, anything to stop that cool smile.

"Actually, darling, I called George a few days ago," she went on. "We got to be rather well acquainted when they were considering my own autobiography. And do you know something? He'd never even heard of you. Obviously a book so important was being handled at the very top level, I told him. Well, he offered to look into it for me. And do you know what?"

"That's not the publisher, it's somebody else."

"Madison House is the one you said, dear. When you lied."

"I did not lie."

"I understand you've been getting quite a lot of mileage out of it, too."

"I'm telling the whole story about your filthy movies. I'll make it sound so disgusting you won't be able to hold your head up in this town."

"Marjorie, shut up. And now listen for a moment. I intended to tell you that I knew all about your little hoax, and that it would remain our secret. After all, your career needs every bit of help it can get. But after listening to you play cat-and-mouse with me I'm going to spread this delicious tale so far and wide that you'll be a laughingstock. Not me, Marjorie. You."

She leaped into the pool and swam away, laughing. Then she

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came back to my side, gripped the coping, and looked up at me.

"I think you've had enough exercise for today," she said. "Why don't you go home?"

I knelt as if to speak to her, grabbed her shoulders, and pushed her face under, her damned smiling face. When she struggled up, spluttering, I held on and hit her head against the tiled edge of the pool, hit her head again and again.

Elvie's housekeeper saw it all. When the police arrived I was in the living room, my bathing suit soaking the white sofa. Yes, I told them, yes, yes, yes. It's all true.

Now, of course, Madison House *has* bought my life story. They're publishing it this spring. You can just imagine some of the tales I'll be telling.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Take an invisible seat at the dinner table and join the seventh monthly get-together of the Black Widowers. At this session Geoffrey Avalon is the host and his guest is a science writer, Simon Levy, who has a seek-and-ye-shall-find problem involving his wife's grandfather, a legacy of $3000 in negotiable bonds, a "dying message" that doesn't have a single word in it, either oral or written, and a fat volume titled THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE. *You'll be captivated . . .*

THE POINTING FINGER

by ISAAC ASIMOV

It was a rather quiet Black Widowers banquet until writer Emmanuel Rubin and code expert Thomas Trumbull had their nose-to-nose confrontation.

Mario Gonzalo, the artist, had missed the previous meeting, so he made up for it by being the first to arrive for this session. He was quite early and Henry, the perennial waiter for the monthly get-together, was still setting the table. Gonzalo lit a cigarette and drew an occasional puff rather slowly and meditatively, while his prominent eyes fixed themselves on Henry.

Gonzalo said, "Why do you stay a waiter, Henry?"

Henry smiled out of his placid and unlined face. "I'm over sixty, Mr. Gonzalo. There's no great demand for me elsewhere. This job is secure, I believe—and there's always the pleasure of the monthly meeting."

"I know all that, Henry," said Mario, "but look what's been happening lately. You've been solving some pretty neat puzzles that stumped the rest of us. You can do something with that talent, can't you?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Gonzalo. These puzzles, as you call them, are really trifles, and if I succeed it is only because I lack

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the brilliance of the members. Their brightness leads them astray and then my own simplicity enables me to see the simple path."

Gonzalo stubbed out his cigarette. "No, no, Henry. That's a bunch of nonsense you're handing me. I'll tell you what—"

But then Geoffrey Avalon, the patent attorney, and his guest arrived, and soon the others were there, and in the flurry of introductions and greetings Gonzalo never completed his sentence. He retired into a rather thoughtful quiet and it was almost as though its intensity weighed down the rest of the members as well.

Avalon, who was hosting the occasion, seemed as always to add the dignity of that office to his natural solemnity. He sipped at his first drink and introduced his guest, a young man with a pleasant face, thinning black hair, and an amazingly thick mustache which seemed to be waiting only for the necessary change in fashion to be waxed at the ends.

"This is Simon Levy," said Avalon. "A science writer and a splendid fellow."

Emmanuel Rubin perked up. "Didn't you write a book on the laser—*Light in Step.*"

"Yes," said Levy with the energetic delight of an author greeting unexpected recognition. "Have you read it?"

Rubin, who was carrying, as he always did, the self-conscious soul of a six-footer in his five-foot-four body, looked solemnly at the other through his thick glasses and said, "I did and thought it quite good."

Levy's smile weakened, as though he considered a judgment of "quite good" not good at all.

Avalon said, "Roger Halsted won't be with us today. He's out of town or something or other. Sends his regrets and asks to say hello to Mario if he shows up."

Trumbull said with his mouth down-curved in a sneer, "At least we're spared a limerick."

"I missed last month's," said Gonzalo. "Was it any good?"

"You wouldn't have understood it, Mario," said Avalon gravely.

"That good, eh?"

And then things quieted down to a near whisper until somehow the Act of Union came up. Afterward, neither Rubin nor Trumbull could remember exactly how.

Trumbull said, in what was considerably more than an ordinary speaking voice, "The Act of Union forming the United Kingdom of England, Wales, and Scotland was made

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law at the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713."

"No, it wasn't," said Rubin, his straw-colored and straggly beard wagging indignantly. "The act was passed in 1707."

"Are you trying to tell me," said Trumbull belligerently, "that the Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1707?"

"No, I'm not," shouted Rubin. "The Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713. You guessed that part right, though God only knows how."

"If the Treaty was signed in 1713, then that settles the date for the Act of Union."

"No, it doesn't, because the Treaty had nothing to do with the Act of Union, which was 1707."

"Five dollars says you don't know the Act of Union from a union suit."

"Here's my five dollars. Put your money where your mouth is."

They were standing up now, leaning toward each other over James Drake, the organic chemist, who philosophically added a fresh dollop of sour cream and chives to the last of his baked potato.

Drake said, "No use shouting back and forth, my fellow jackasses. Look it up."

"*Henry!*" roared Trumbull.

There was the smallest of delays and then Henry was at hand with the third edition of the Columbia Encyclopedia.

"Host's privilege," said Avalon. "I'll check, as an impartial observer."

He turned the pages of the fat volume, muttering, "Union, union, ah, Act of." He then said, almost at once, "1707. Manny wins. Pay up, Tom."

"What?" cried Trumbull, outraged. "*Let me see that.*"

Rubin quietly picked up the two five-dollar bills which had been lying on the table and said in a ruminating voice, "A good reference book, the Columbia Encyclopedia. In my opinion the best one-volume all-round reference in the world and more useful than the Britannica, even if the Columbia does waste an entry on Isaac Asimov."

"On whom?" asked Gonzalo.

"Asimov. Friend of mine. Science-fiction writer and pathologically conceited. He carries a copy of the Encyclopedia to parties and says, 'Talking of concrete, the Columbia Encyclopedia has an excellent article on it only 249 pages after their article on me. Let me show you.' Then he shows them the article on himself."

Gonzalo laughed. "Sounds a lot like you, Manny."

"Tell him that and he'll kill you—if I don't first."

Simon Levy turned to

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Avalon and said, "Are there arguments like this all the time here, Jeff?"

"Many arguments," said Avalon, "but they generally don't get to the wager and reference-book stage. When it does happen, Henry's always prepared. We have not only the Columbia Encyclopedia, but copies of the Bible, both the King James and the New English; Webster's Unabridged—Second Edition, of course; Webster's Biographical Dictionary; Webster's Geographical Dictionary; the Guinness Book of Records; Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable; and the Complete Works of Shakespeare. It's the Black Widowers' library and Henry is the custodian. It usually settles all arguments."

"I'm sorry I asked," said Levy.

"Why?"

"You mentioned Shakespeare and I react to that, right now, with anger and frustration."

"To Shakespeare?" Avalon gazed at his guest with lofty disapproval.

"You bet. I've been living with him for two months, reading him backward and forward till one more 'Why, marry' or 'fretful porpentine' and I'll have it up to here."

"Really? Well, wait. —Henry, is dessert coming up soon?"

"Directly, sir. Coupe aux marrons."

"Good! —Simon, wait till dessert's finished and we'll carry on."

Ten minutes later Avalon placed spoon to water glass and tinkled the assemblage to silence. "Host's privilege," he said. "It is time for the usual inquisition, but our honored guest has let slip that for the past two months he has been studying Shakespeare with great concentration, and I think this ought to be investigated. Tom, will you do the honors?"

Trumbull said indignantly, "Shakespeare? Who the hell wants to talk about Shakespeare?" His disposition had not been improved by the loss of five dollars and by the look of unearthly virtue on Rubin's face.

"Host's privilege," said Avalon firmly.

"Humph. All right. Mr. Levy, as a science writer, what is your connection with Shakespeare?"

"None, as a science writer." He spoke with a distinct Brooklyn accent. "It's just that I'm looking for three thousand dollars."

"In Shakespeare?"

"Somewhere in Shakespeare. Can't say I've had any luck, though."

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"You speak in riddles, Levy. What do you mean three thousand dollars that you can't find somewhere in Shakespeare?"

"Oh, well, it's a complicated story."

"Well, *tell* it. That's what we're here for. It's a long-standing rule that nothing said in this room is ever repeated outside under any circumstances, so you may speak freely. And if you get boring we'll simply stop you."

Levy spread his arms. "All right, but let me finish my tea."

"Go ahead. Henry will bring you another pot, since you aren't civilized enough to drink coffee. —Henry!"

"Yes, sir," murmured Henry.

"Don't start till he comes back," said Trumbull. "We don't want him to miss any of this."

"The waiter?" Levy asked.

"He's one of us. Best man here."

Henry arrived with a fresh pot of tea and Levy said, "It's a question of a legacy, sort of. It's not one of those things where the family homestead is at stake, or millions in jewels, or anything like that. It's just three thousand dollars which I don't really need, but which would be nice to have."

"A legacy from whom?" asked Drake.

"From my wife's grandfather. He died two months ago at the age of seventy-six. He'd been living with us for five years. A little troublesome, but he was a nice old guy, and being on my wife's side of the family she took care of him. He was sort of grateful to us for taking him in. There were no other descendants and it was either us or a hotel for old people."

"Get to the legacy," said Trumbull.

"Grandpa wasn't rich but he had a few thousand. When he first came to us he told us he had bought three thousand dollars' worth of negotiable bonds and would give it to us when he died."

"Why when he died?" asked Rubin.

"I suppose the old guy was worried about our getting tired of him. He held out the three thousand to us as a sort of reward for our good behavior. If he was still with us when he was dying, he would give it to us, and if we kicked him out, he wouldn't. I guess that was what was in his mind."

Levy went on. "He hid it in various places. Old guys can be funny. He'd change the hiding place now and then whenever he began to fear we might spot it. Of course, we usually did spot it before long, but we'd never let on and we'd never

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touch it. Except once. He put it in the clothes hamper and we had to give it back to him and ask him to put it elsewhere, or sooner or later the bonds would get into the washing machine.

"That was about the time he had a small stroke and after that he was a little harder to handle. He grew morose and didn't talk much. He had difficulties in using his right leg and it gave him a feeling of mortality. After that he must have hidden the bonds more effectively because we lost track of them, though we didn't attach much importance to that. We assumed he would tell us when he was ready.

"Then two months ago little Julia, my younger daughter, came running to us to tell us that Grandpa was lying on the couch and looking funny. We ran to the living room, and it was obvious that he'd had another stroke. We called the doctor, but it was clear that his right side was gone entirely. He couldn't speak. He could move his lips and make sounds, but they didn't form words.

"He kept moving his left arm and trying to speak and I said, 'Grandpa, are you trying to tell us something?' He could just about tremor his head into a small nod. 'About what?' I asked, but I realized he couldn't tell me, so I said, 'About the bonds?' Again a tiny nod. 'You want us to have it?' Again a nod and his hand began to move as though he were trying to point.

"I said, 'Where is it?' His left hand trembled and continued to point. I couldn't help but say, 'What are you pointing at, Grandpa?' but he couldn't tell me. His finger just kept pointing in an anxious quivering way, and his face seemed in agony as he tried to talk and failed. I was sorry for him. He wanted to give the bonds to us, to reward us, and he was dying without being able to.

"My wife Caroline was crying and saying, 'Leave him alone, Simon,' but I *couldn't* leave him alone. I couldn't let him die in despair that way. I said, 'We'll have to move the couch toward whatever it is he's pointing to.' Caroline didn't want to, but the old man was nodding his head.

"Caroline got at one end of the couch and I at the other and we moved it, little by little, trying not to jar him. He was no lightweight either. His finger kept pointing, always pointing. He turned his head in the direction in which we were moving him, making moaning sounds as though to indicate whether we were moving him in the right direction or not. I would say, 'More to the right, Grandpa?' 'More to the left?'

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and sometimes he would nod.

"Finally we got him up against the line of bookcases, and slowly his head turned. I wanted to turn it for him, but I was afraid to harm him. He managed to get it round and stared at the books for a long time. Then his finger moved along the line of books till it pointed to one particular book. It was a copy of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, the Kittredge edition.

"I said, 'Shakespeare, Grandpa?' He didn't answer, he didn't nod, but his face relaxed and he stopped trying to speak. Something like a half smile pulled at the left side of his mouth and he died. The doctor came, the body was taken away, and we made arrangements for the funeral. It wasn't till after the funeral that we went back to the Shakespeare.

"I assumed there would be something in the Shakespeare book to tell us where the bonds were, and that's when the first shock came. We turned through every page, one by one, and there was nothing there. Not a scrap a paper. Not a word."

Gonzalo said, "What about the binding? You know, in between the stuff that glues the pages and the backstrip?"

"Nothing there."

"Maybe someone already took it?"

"How? The only ones who knew were Caroline and me. It isn't as though there were any robbery. Eventually we decided there must be a clue somewhere in the book, in the written material, in the plays themselves. That was Caroline's idea. In the last two months I've read every word of Shakespeare's plays; every word of his sonnets and miscellaneous poems—twice over. And I've gotten nowhere."

"Forget Shakespeare," said Trumbull. "Forget the clue. He left the bonds somewhere in the house."

"Why do you suppose that?" said Levy. "He might have put it in a bank vault for all we know. He got around even after his first stroke. And after we found the bonds in the clothes hamper he might have thought the house wasn't safe."

"All right, but he still might have put it in the house somewhere. Why not just search?"

"We did. Or at least Caroline did. That was how we divided the work. She searched the house, which is a big rambling one—one reason we could take in Grandpa—and I searched Shakespeare, and we both came up with nothing."

Avalon untwisted a thoughtful frown and said, "See here, there's no reason we can't be

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logical about this. I assume, Simon, your grandfather was born in Europe."

"Yes. He came to America as a teen-ager, just as World War One was starting. He got out just in time."

"He didn't have much of a formal education, I suppose."

"None at all," said Levy. "He went to work in a tailor shop, eventually got his own establishment, and stayed a tailor till he retired. No formal education at all, except for the usual religious education that Jews gave each other in Czarist Russia."

"Well, then," said Avalon, "how do you expect him to indicate a clue in Shakespeare's plays? He wouldn't know anything about them."

Levy frowned and leaned back in his chair. He hadn't touched the small brandy glass that Henry had put in front of him sometime before. Now he picked it up, twirled the stem gently in his fingers, and put it down again.

"You're quite wrong, Jeff," he said, a little distantly. "He may have been uneducated but he was quite intelligent and very well read. He knew the Bible almost by heart, and he'd read *War and Peace* as a teen-ager. He read Shakespeare, too. Listen, we once went to see a production of 'Hamlet' in the park and he got more out of it than I did."

Rubin broke in. "I have no intention of ever seeing 'Hamlet' again till they get a Hamlet who looks as Hamlet is supposed to look. Fat!"

"Fat?" said Trumbull indignantly.

"Yes, fat. The Queen says of Hamlet in the last scene, 'He's fat and scant of breath.' If Shakespeare says Hamlet is fat—"

"That's his mother talking, not Shakespeare. It's the typical motherly oversolicitousness of a not-too-bright woman—"

Avalon banged the table, "Not now, gentlemen!"

He turned to Levy. "In what language did your grandfather read the Bible?"

"In Hebrew, of course," Levy said coldly.

"And *War and Peace?*"

"In Russian. But he read Shakespeare in English."

"Which is not his native tongue. I imagine he spoke with an accent."

Levy's coolness descended into the frigid. "Just what are you getting at, Jeff?"

Avalon harrumphed. "I'm not being anti-Semitic, if that's what's bothering you. I'm merely pointing out the obvious fact that if your wife's grandfather was not at home with the English language there

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was a limit to how subtly he could use Shakespeare as a reference. He was not likely to use the phrase 'and there the antick sits' from 'Richard II' because, however well read he was, he wasn't likely to know what an antick is."

"What is it?" asked Gonzalo.

"Never mind," said Avalon impatiently. "If your grandfather used Shakespeare it would have to be some perfectly obvious reference."

"What was his favorite play?" asked Trumbull.

"He liked 'Hamlet,' of course. I know he didn't like the comedies," said Levy, "because he felt the humor was undignified, and the histories meant nothing to him. Wait, he liked 'Othello'."

"All right," said Avalon. "Then we ought to concentrate on 'Hamlet' and 'Othello'."

"I read them. You don't think I left them out, do you?"

"And it would have to be some well-known passage," Avalon went on. "No one would think that just pointing to Shakespeare would be a useful hint if some obscure line were intended."

"The only reason he just pointed," said Levy, "was that he couldn't talk. It *might* have been something obscure which he would have explained if he could have talked."

"If he could have talked," said Drake reasonably, "he wouldn't have had to explain anything. He would just have told you where the bonds were."

"Exactly," said Avalon. "A good point, Jim. You said, Simon, that after the old man pointed to Shakespeare his face relaxed and he stopped trying to speak. He felt that he had given you all you needed to know."

"Well, he didn't," said Levy glumly.

"Let's reason it out, then," said Avalon.

"Do we have to?" said Drake. "Why not ask Henry now? —Henry, which verse in Shakespeare would suit our purpose?"

Henry, who was noiselessly taking up the dessert dishes, said, "I have only an average knowledge of the plays of Shakespeare, sir, but I must admit that no appropriate verse occurs to me."

Drake looked disappointed, but Avalon said, "Come on, Jim. Henry has done very well on past occasions but there's no need to feel that we are helpless without him. I flatter myself I know Shakespeare pretty well."

"I'm no novice either," said Rubin.

"Then between the two of us let's solve this. Suppose we

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consider 'Hamlet' first. If it's 'Hamlet,' then it has to be one of the soliloquies because they're the best-known portions of the play."

"In fact," said Rubin, "the line 'To be, or not to be: that is the question' is the best-known line of all Shakespeare. It epitomizes him as the 'Quartet' from 'Rigoletto' typifies all opera."

"I agree," said Avalon, "and that soliloquy talks of dying, and the old man was dying. 'To die: to sleep: No more; and by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is—' "

"Yes, but what good does that do?" said Levy impatiently. "Where does it get us?"

Avalon, who always recited Shakespeare in what he insisted was Shakespearian pronunciation (which sounded remarkably like an Irish brogue), said, "Well, I'm not sure."

Gonzalo asked suddenly, "Is it in 'Hamlet' where Shakespeare says, 'The play's the thing'?"

"Yes," said Avalon, " 'the play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.' "

"Well," said Gonzalo, "if the old man was pointing out a book of plays, maybe that's the line. Do you have a picture of a king, a carving, a statue, or a deck of cards, maybe?"

Levy shrugged. "That doesn't bring anything to mind."

"What about 'Othello'?" asked Rubin. "Listen. The best-known part of the play is Iago's speech on reputation, 'Good name in man and woman, dear my lord . . .' "

"So?" said Avalon.

"And the most famous line in it, and one which the old man was sure to know because it's the one everyone knows, even Mario, is 'Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing; 'twas mine, 'tis his . . .' and so on."

"So?" said Avalon again.

"So it sounds as though it applies to the legacy. ' 'Twas mine, 'tis his', and it also sounds as though the legacy were gone. 'Who steals my purse steals trash.' "

"What do you mean, gone?" said Levy.

"After you found the bonds in the clothes hamper you lost track of it, you said. Maybe the old man took it off somewhere to be safe and doesn't remember where. Or maybe he mislaid it or gave it away or lost it in some confidence scheme. Whatever it was, he could no longer explain it to you without speech. So to die in peace, he pointed to the works of

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Shakespeare. You would remember the best-known line of his favorite play which tells you that his purse is only trash—and that is why you have found nothing."

"I don't believe that," said Levy. "I asked him if he wanted us to have the bonds and he nodded."

"All he could do was nod, and he *did* want you to have them, but that was impossible. —Do you agree with me, Henry?"

Henry, who had completed his tasks and was quietly listening, said, "I'm afraid I don't, Mr. Rubin."

"I don't either," said Levy.

Gonzalo snapped his fingers. "Wait, wait. Doesn't Shakespeare say anything about bonds?"

"Not in his time," said Drake, smiling.

"I'm sure of it," said Gonzalo. "Something about bonds being nominated."

Avalon said, "Ah! You mean 'Is it so nominated in the bond?' The bond is a legal contract, and the question was whether something was a requirement of the contract."

Drake said, "Wait a bit. Didn't that bond involve a sum of three thousand ducats?"

"By heaven, so it did," said Avalon.

Gonzalo's grin split his face from ear to ear. "I think I've got something there—bonds involving three thousand units of money. That's the play to look into."

Henry interrupted softly. "I scarcely think so, gentlemen. The play in question is 'The Merchant of Venice,' and the person asking whether something was nominated in the bond was the Jew, Shylock, intent on revenge. Surely the old man would not have enjoyed that play."

Levy said, "You're right. Shylock was a dirty word to him—and not so clean to me either."

Rubin said, "What about the passage that goes: 'Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions . . .'?"

"It wouldn't have appealed to my grandfather," said Levy. "It pleads the obvious and cries out for an equality my grandfather would not, in his heart, have been willing to grant, since I'm sure he felt superior in that he was a member of God's uniquely chosen."

Gonzalo looked disappointed. "It seems we're not getting anywhere."

Levy said, "No, I don't think we are. I went through the entire book. I read all the

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speeches carefully, including all the passages you mentioned. None of them meant anything to me."

Avalon said, "Granted they don't, but you may be missing something subtle—"

"Come on, Jeff, you're the one who said it couldn't be subtle. My grandfather was thinking of something tailored to my mind and my wife's. It was something we would understand, and probably understand at once; and we didn't."

Drake said, "Maybe you're right. Maybe some in-joke is involved."

"I've just said that."

"Then why don't you try it backward? Can you think of something, some gag, some phrase—is there some expression he used often?"

"Yes. When he disapproved of someone he would say, 'Eighteen black years on him.' "

"What kind of expression is that?" asked Trumbull.

"In Yiddish it's common enough," said Levy. "Another one was, 'It will help him like a dead man cups.' "

"What does that mean?" asked Gonzalo.

"It refers to cupping. You place a lighted piece of paper in a small round glass cup and then put the open edge against the skin. The flame goes out but leaves a partial vacuum in the cup and circulation is sucked into the superficial layers. Naturally, cupping can't improve the circulation of a corpse."

"All right," said Drake, "is there anything about eighteen black years, or about cupping dead men, that reminds you of something in Shakespeare?"

There was a painful silence and finally Avalon said, "I can't think of anything."

"And even if you did," said Levy, "what good would it do? What would it mean? —Listen, I've been at this for two months. You're not going to solve it in two hours."

Drake turned to Henry again and said, "Why are you just standing there, Henry? Can't you help us?"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Drake, but I now believe the whole question of Shakespeare is a false lead."

"No," said Levy. "You can't say that. The old man pointed to the volume of *Collected Works* without any question. His fingertip was within an inch of it. It couldn't have been any other book."

Drake said suddenly, "Say, Levy, you're not diddling us, are you? You're not telling us a pack of lies to make fools out of us?"

"What?" said Levy, in amazement.

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"Nothing, nothing," said Avalon hastily. "He's just thinking of another occasion. Shut up, Jim."

"Listen," said Levy. "I'm telling you exactly what happened. He was pointing to the Shakespeare book and nothing else."

There was a short silence. Then Henry sighed and said, "In mystery stories—"

Rubin broke in with "Hear! Hear!"

"In mystery stories," Henry repeated, "the dying message is a common device, but I have never been able to take it seriously. A dying man, anxious to give last-minute information, is always pictured as presenting the most complex clue. His dying brain, with two minutes of grace, works out a pattern that would puzzle a healthy brain with hours to think it out. In this particular case we have an old man dying of a paralyzing stroke who is supposed to have quickly invented a clue that a group of intelligent men have failed to work out, and with one of them having worked at it for two months. I can only conclude there is no such clue."

"Then why should he have pointed to Shakespeare?" asked Levy. "Was it all just the vague delusions of a dying man?"

"If your story is correct," said Henry, "then I think he was indeed trying to do something. He cannot, however, have been inventing a clue. He was doing the only thing his dying mind could manage. He was pointing to the bonds."

"I beg your pardon," said Levy. "I was there, and I tell you he was pointing to Shakespeare."

Henry shook his head. "Mr. Levy, would you please point to Fifth Avenue?"

Levy thought a while, obviously orienting himself, and then pointed.

"Are you pointing to Fifth Avenue?" asked Henry.

"Well, the restaurant's entrance is on Fifth Avenue, so I'm pointing to it."

"It seems to me, sir," said Henry, "that you are pointing to a picture of the Arch of Titus on the western wall of this room."

"Well, I am, but Fifth Avenue is beyond it."

"Exactly, sir. So I only know that you are pointing to Fifth Avenue because you tell me so. You might be pointing to the picture or to some point in the air before the picture, or to the Hudson River beyond Fifth Avenue, or to Chicago even farther away, or even to the planet, Jupiter. If you point, and do nothing more, giving no hint, verbal or

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otherwise, as to exactly what you're pointing at, you are only indicating a *direction.*"

Levy rubbed his chin. "You mean my grandfather was only indicating a direction?"

"It must be so. He didn't *say* he was pointing to Shakespeare. He merely pointed—in a certain direction."

"All right, then, what was he pointing at? The—the—" Levy closed his eyes and fingered his mustache gently, as he oriented the room in his house. "The Verrazano Bridge?"

"Probably not, sir," said Henry. "He was pointing in the direction of the *Collected Works.* His finger was an inch from it, you said, so it is doubtful that he could be pointing at anything in front of it. What was behind the book, Mr. Levy?"

"The bookcase. The back wall of the bookcase. When you took the book out, there was nothing behind it—nothing pushed up against the wood of the back wall. We would have seen it at once if anything had been there."

"And behind the bookcase, sir?"

"The wall of the room."

"And between the bookcase and the wall of the room, sir?"

Levy became silent. He thought a while, and no one interrupted those thoughts. He said, "Is there a phone I can use, Henry?"

"I'll bring you one, sir."

The phone was placed in front of Levy and plugged in. Levy dialed a number.

"Hello, Julia? What are you doing up so late? —Never mind the TV and get to bed. But first call Mama, dear. —Hello, Caroline, it's Simon. —Yes, I'm having a good time, but listen, Caroline, listen. You know the bookcase with the Shakespeare in it? —Yes, *that* Shakespeare. Of course. Move it away from the wall. —The bookcase, I mean. —Look, you can take the books out of it, can't you? Take them all out if you have to and dump them on the floor. This is important. —No, no, just move the end of the bookcase near the door a few inches, just enough to look behind it and tell me if you see anything. —Look just about where the Shakespeare book would be. —I'll wait, yes."

They were all frozen. Levy was distinctly pale. Some five minutes passed. Then, "Caroline? —Okay, take it easy. Did you move— Okay, okay, I'll be home soon."

He hung up and said, "If that doesn't beat everything. The old guy had the bonds taped to the back of the bookcase! He must have moved that thing some time when we

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were out. It's a wonder he didn't have a stroke then and there."

"You did it again, Henry," said Gonzalo.

Levy said, "Finder's fee is three hundred dollars, Henry."

Henry said, "I am well paid by the club, sir. There is no need for a fee."

Levy reddened slightly and changed the subject. "But how did you get the trick of it, when the rest of us—"

"It was not difficult," said Henry. "The rest of you happened to track down the wrong paths, and I simply suggested the one that was left."

"Q"

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"A surviving heir, spouse or devisee who is convicted of feloniously and with premeditation killing the decedent is not entitled to any benefits under the will of the decedent nor under the laws of intestacy . . ."

That's all Harry E. Hokinson, house painter and mail-order dealer in combat knives, had to know . . .

LEAP DAY

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

Whenever Harry E. Hokinson reflected that he had nothing to show for his 37 years but a house-painting business and a side enterprise of selling combat knives by mail, he tended to voice pessimistic sentiments, even though no one could hear them but himself. The glum outlook fitted well with Harry's face, which with its beady panda eyes, bulgy nose, plump jowls, and floppy earlobes was at the best of times a study in mournfulness.

"It's a rotten world," Harry confided to himself.

"You said a snootful, pal," he agreed.

The cocktail party had turned out to be a noisy gathering of dull and stupid people—that is, people whom Harry couldn't talk into getting a house painted or buying a combat knife. Having downed several free Scotches and satisfied himself that no business prospects were in sight, he was about to take off when he found himself boxed in a corner with a decrepit retired attorney named Gideon Prendergast.

The old man accompanied his nonstop monologue with such freely swinging gesticulations of both his snack-filled hands that Harry couldn't edge out of the corner without having an assortment of pretzel crumbs dusting his new sports jacket. After three attempts Harry shut his eyes and resigned himself.

"Yessir, as I was saying, my job for the widow was nowhere near done when the cops got the confession out of the brother that he'd killed Dr. Trout. To make sure Mrs. Trout got the whole of the doc's estate we had to make certain

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the brother was convicted of Murder One—of Murder One and nothing short of Murder One. For the statute of our sister state east of the river is very clear on that, y'see. I can give you the exact words if you'd like—"

"You don't have to—" Harry tried to interrupt.

"—which have been graven on my memory to this very day, twenty-seven years later," declaimed Prendergast, jabbing a pretzel stick under Harry's bulbous nose. " 'A surviving heir, spouse or devisee who is convicted of feloniously and with premeditation killing the decedent is not entitled to any benefits under the will of the decedent nor under the laws of intestacy, and the decedent's estate shall descend and be distributed as if the said convictee had predeceased the decedent.'

"Y'see, my boy, property is paramount in our American system of justice, and the law doesn't divest a man of his property except in the rarest of cases. Many many years ago the Supreme Court of our sister state east of the river handed down a landmark decision called *Kunkle v. Gucci* which ruled that nothing short of a conviction for murder in the first degree can trigger the operation of the divestment statute. So of course to protect the property rights of Mrs. Trout we had to make sure brother Sylvanus Trout received the full extent of his deserts for his dastardly act of fratricide. Heh heh—let me tell you how the widow and I fixed the estate funds so he couldn't hire himself a lawyer to defend him."

It took Harry another twenty minutes before he broke free on the excuse of a raging headache and scrambled out of the smoke-filled reception room as if the devil were two paces behind him. But seven weeks later, after Delbert Coombes had smashed the bronze bust of Gandhi against Mrs. Coombes's skull, Harry became rather grateful that he'd been buttonholed by the old legal shark.

When Delbert committed his crime he had not the least idea of the juridical can of worms he was opening. The legal ramifications were surely the last thing on his mind that sunny September afternoon when he came home early from tramping the woods of his wife's estate and found the young and sportive Mrs. Coombes intertwined indiscreetly with the gardener.

Felicia Detweiler Coombes was ecstatically contrasting the gardener's repertoire with Delbert's as Delbert entered the bedroom. He had been a lifelong believer in nonviolence but the bloody underside of his

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nature took command for the few moments needed to smash the Mahatma into Felicia's cranium. The gardener would have been next but before Delbert could reach him he dived off the balcony into the rosebushes and scurried away like a large naked jackrabbit. When Delbert saw what he had done he wept, and called the police.

It was a sordid, intellectually uninspiring murder, the kind with which the police blotters of the world are glutted. A spoiled young heiress, an unwise marriage to a gentle unworldly professor many years her senior, a cycle of extramarital romps, and then the payoff. The world would leer but otherwise couldn't care less. Felicia was the last of her line, leaving no relatives to mourn her. Delbert knew of no relatives he had living, and would not have expected help from them had he known of any. Newspapers and wire services carried the story across Middle America.

It was the Wauwau *Argus* that brought the murder from the sister state east of the river into the home of Harry E. Hokinson, who had not thought of Delbert Coombes for years. Certainly he had had no idea that his second cousin once removed had married money. Had he known of Delbert's good fortune he would have long ago introduced himself and wangled a contract to repaint every building on the Coombes grounds.

But the story in the *Argus* gave Harry even bigger ideas. It was a very complete story, giving readers not only a judicious estimate of the extent of the Detweiler holdings but also the information that by her will Felicia Detweiler Coombes had left all these holdings after taxes to her beloved husband, Delbert Coombes.

Harry E. Hokinson began to think. Three nights later, after he had prepared the parcels of combat knives that would go out in the morning mail, he picked up the evening's *Argus* and noticed two items in the follow-up story on the Coombes murder case that made him think even harder.

Item One: The District Attorney had announced at a press conference that he would seek against Delbert Coombes a verdict of murder in the first degree.

Item Two: Murder being a bailable offense in the sister state east of the river, Delbert had been released on $250,000 bond and on condition that he remain in the city. He had stated that he would move into the Coombes penthouse apartment at 454 West Boulevard pending further legal steps.

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Harry E. Hokinson's general knowledge of law was limited to what he had picked up from watching Perry Mason reruns and painting the Wauwau County Courthouse two years before, but the details of Gideon Prendergast's monologue had stuck to his memory like wet paint to a wall, and their application to his own desires was a matter of plain common sense —a quality which every house painter is forced to develop on penalty of painting himself daily into a corner.

Point A: If Delbert should be convicted of first-degree murder, he would be divested of all the property left to him under his late wife's will. That was the rule in *Kunkle v. Gucci.*

Point B: If he should be convicted only of a lesser offense, like second-degree murder or manslaughter, he would keep all the property. That was the point of old Prendergast's yammerings.

Point C followed as naturally as it followed from the nature of paint and the nature of water that one does not paint the exterior of a building in a rainstorm. If cousin Delbert should happen to suffer a fatal accident *before* he went to trial, while he was out on bail, then as Delbert's closest living relative Harry E. Hokinson would take by intestacy every cent of the fortune Delbert had inherited from Felicia.

"It's as simple as Q.E.D.," Harry assured himself.

"Wait a minute, pal," he cautioned himself. "Suppose Delbie just happens to have made a will leaving everything to someone besides you. Unless he dies without a will you get nothing."

"No one makes a will in our family," he reminded himself. "It's been taboo ever since a passing horsecar cut Great-Grandpa Lasswitz in two the very day he had signed his last will and testament."

"Well then, suppose Delbie has relatives you don't know about who are closer than you? Then you'd be disposing of him just to fatten someone else's pockets."

"Uh uh. Delbert and I are the only ones left, and even we haven't met face to face. No, wait. I think there may be one other twelfth cousin or something, but I seem to recall he's in graduate school somewhere out west. Probably one of these long-haired radical punks that sets fire to ROTC buildings. Even if I have to share with the kid, half the Detweiler estate is worth it."

"Right," he agreed. "And after all, it's not really murder to execute a self-confessed wife killer. But just remember you

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have to make it look like suicide or an accident. If the cops should ever suspect you, that law Prendergast quoted might keep you from inheriting from Delbie."

"Don't worry," Harry E. Hokinson replied to himself. "I thought up the perfect plan tonight when I read that he's staying in a penthouse. It's going to be a long drop to the ground for cousin Delbert."

And as Harry let a long swallow of the evening's fourth beer plummet from gullet to gut he belched with self-satisfaction.

It took patience to wait for the right moment, but patience like common sense is the house painter's stock in trade. It wouldn't do for Harry to close up shop and be suspiciously out of Wauwau at the precise time Delbert took his leap—unless, of course, Harry scheduled Leap Day for a time when all the businesses would be closed and many townspeople were away, such as the four-day Thanksgiving weekend.

So Harry E. Hokinson continued to slap paint on moldering exteriors by day and prepare parcels of combat knives for his mail-order clients by night. On Election Day he voted a straight Law-and-Order ticket.

At quitting time the day before Thanksgiving, Harry went home, carefully cleaned the paint from under his nails, showered, changed to turtleneck, slacks, and sports jacket, strapped one of his combat knives to an ankle sheath in case of emergency, packed an unmonogrammed suitcase, threw it into the well of his second-hand BMW, and headed east through the purple twilight. During the six-hour drive on the Interstate to the far end of the next state he reviewed each step of his plan and found the whole flawless. He reached the outskirts of the city just before midnight, checked into a chain motel as Roger Smyth, and slept like a baby, serene in the knowledge that he was about to achieve his version of the American Dream.

On Thanksgiving Day he rose early and breakfasted, then drove north into the wooded foothills to take his first view of the property that would shortly be his. For half an hour he circled the sprawling grounds, carpeted in bronze with crisply drying leaves. He could glimpse the big house from a distance but decided it was too risky to drive nearer for a closer look.

"God, it's rich," he sighed to himself. "Too good for an egghead like Delbert."

"But just right for an average

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Joe like Harry Hokinson," he replied.

He made one last swing around the property, then headed back toward the city. Downtown was all but deserted, but Harry had noted an inconspicuous place where he could park. He drove around the vicinity of the 29-story highrise at 454 West Boulevard until he located a classy-looking restaurant whose adjacent parking lot had just begun to fill with the early-afternoon Thanksgiving trade.

He pulled into a slot surrounded by other cars, locked up, sauntered out of the lot, and began the eight-block crosstown walk back to his destination. Except for a few customers in front of Sampson's MiniSuperMart, Open Seven Days a Week, he passed no one.

He strolled casually past the glassed-in vestibule of the highrise and saw that the doorman more or less on duty was a frail and wizened gnome of about 90 who slouched in a chair to one side of the inner door. Harry approached the entrance and made loud rattling and jangling noises with his keyring while pretending to fit a key into the outer door's lock. The dodge worked. The doorman got up, shambled over, and opened up for him.

"How goes it, old buddy?" Harry greeted him, as if he'd been coming in and out of the building for years.

"Oh, fine, fine, Mr. Gwumpf," the old man replied.

Harry walked past him confidently, marveling at how often the doormen in these highrises were too old and feeble to recognize who belonged and who didn't but would eat live coals rather than admit they were failing. He punched the elevator's Up button and a waiting cage lifted him.

As he ascended he went over his plan again. One: Be casual but touch nothing in the apartment. Two: Get Delbert out to the rooftop and push. Three: Take the elevator down to the basement garage, walk up the ramp to the street, mingle with the crowd around Delbert's remains for a few minutes, then slip away, walk back to the restaurant, drive to the motel, check out, then return to Wauwau.

The elevator door whispered open at 29 and Harry strode past the line of closed apartment doors and mounted the flight of azure-carpeted spiral stairs at the end of the corridor. At the top of the flight he knocked on the massive door. After a half minute's wait it opened and there stood his quarry, framed in a coffin of light.

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Delbert Coombes, egghead, wife killer, and sudden millionaire, looked like a man at the edge of his nerves. His bloodshot eyes were ringed by grimy circles of sleeplessness. He was unshaved, his shirt was rumpled, and he walked in a listless shuffle.

"Mr. Coombes? My name is Percy Cranbrook. I'm a novelist. You may have heard of me?" It would have staggered Harry if his cousin had nodded yes, since the name had been made up on the crosstown walk; but Delbert said nothing. "I write psychological crime novels," Harry went on glibly. "I happened to be visiting friends here for the holiday and wondered if I could impose on you to talk with me for a few minutes about—uh—"

"You're not from the newspapers or TV?" Delbert demanded in a quavering voice.

"Absolutely not. The media giving you a hard time? Thought so. I can tell just from looking at you that this mess has hit you where you live. No one in your corner, everybody kicking you when you're down. Well, maybe I can help. I'll bet you haven't eaten a square meal for a week! Suppose I take you out for a full-course Thanksgiving dinner?"

It was a simple adaptation of Harry's technique of persuading little old ladies on Social Security that they needed their places painted, a technique he had honed to perfection over the years. Watching Delbert's face, he could see the soft sell working.

"That's kind of you, Mr. Cranbrook, but even if I managed to get anything down, I couldn't hold it. I had the delivery boy from Sampson's drop off some groceries a few days ago but I can't eat any of it. I'm living on booze and instant coffee and cigarettes. Could I offer you something?" He led the way into a magnificent but unused-looking kitchen. "I've got some fresh fruit that'll go bad in a few days if you don't have some."

"Well, thanks very much," said Harry, reaching into the fruit bowl on a formica counter and helping himself to a plump orange with the thought that disposing of the peel and pits would give him an excuse later for walking around and getting the layout of the place. They passed through the foyer into a forty-foot living room, with oak rafters supporting an inverted V-shaped ceiling, inch-deep azure carpeting, and enough chairs and sofas in elegantly subdued blues and grays to seat a small convention. A haze of stale tobacco smoke hung in the air and the ashtrays on the

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occasional tables were overflowing. Between bites of the orange Harry began to draw Delbert out.

"It's a terrible thing to see yourself in all your hideous nakedness," Delbert said after about ten minutes of disjointed reminiscences. "All my adult life I've thought of myself as an enlightened, liberal, tolerant guy. I worked hard to get the junior college where I teach—taught—to set up a special admissions program for black students. I rang doorbells for McCarthy in '68 and for McGovern last year. And yet when I saw Felicia in bed with that—that gardener—I coldbloodedly murdered her, and if the man hadn't jumped off the balcony I would have killed him, too."

"But, Mr. Coombes, you were driven beyond human endurance," Harry said. "I just can't see how that stupid prosecutor can insist on charging you with murder in the first degree."

"Mr. Cranbrook, the Detweiler family virtually founded this city. They're an institution here, and Felicia was the last of the line. Now she's not only dead at the age of twenty-eight but publicly shamed. There's an old American tradition that whoever reveals the truth about an honored institution will be made to suffer for it. That's why they're going for first degree. But, hell, I deserve it.

"When I made my statement to the police I told them the same things I'm telling you. I stopped and, God help me, I thought about it before I killed her. That's premeditation. I'm guilty. My lawyer wants me to plead temporary insanity but I'm going to plead guilty and take whatever punishment they give me. It won't be anything compared with how I'm punishing myself."

Harry thought he knew what Delbert wanted to be told and decided it was good tactics to accommodate him. "Mr. Coombes, you're too good a man to destroy yourself this way," he insisted with all the solemnity he could muster. "Uhhh—where can I throw this orange peel? No, sit still, I remember where the kitchen is."

Slowly and full of thought he walked past the French door opening onto the balcony. He didn't think it would take him more than a few minutes now to persuade Delbert that the balcony would be a more comfortable spot to continue his ruminations. Then a quick blow to the solar plexus, a hearty heave over the railing, and it would be done—and this penthouse and the country mansion and whatever else had been in

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the Detweiler family would be his, all his, and money beyond measure would pour down on him like green paint from upturned cans.

He made his move on his return from the kitchen wastebasket. "It's, uh, a little stuffy in here, wouldn't you say? All this smoke—I was born with weak lungs, you know. Do you mind if I let in some air from the balcony?" He didn't wait for permission but strode to the nearest French door and tugged on the knob with a handkerchief-wrapped hand, concealed from Delbert's sight by the bulk of his body. "Hey," he said after a few seconds, "this door seems to be stuck or something."

Delbert rose and walked over to him, causing Harry to cram the handkerchief hastily up his coatsleeve. "Not stuck," Delbert explained. "Sealed. As soon as I moved in here I realized how simple it would be to jump off and end this nightmare. I can't let myself off the hook that easily. I had workmen come in and seal this door. There's no way out to the balcony. That's why the place smells so stuffy."

"Oh," said Harry E. Hokinson.

Inwardly he was more loquacious and far more eloquent. He turned away so that Delbert couldn't see the frustration that mottled Harry's face. Every obscene imprecation he had heard in his life poured soundlessly from his tight lips. To be so near the climax and then to have his whole beautiful plan ripped to shreds by this masochistic social-conscious creep!

Harry thought furiously. He had to devise a substitute plan, and fast. He looked up to the stout overhead oak beams as if for inspiration, and suddenly he had it. Beams—rope—despondent wife killer hangs himself. The train of thought formed itself in an instant.

But he needed a rope. And he had no reason to believe there would be one in this plush penthouse. He would have to find an open hardware store and pay a return visit to Delbert tomorrow.

Pleading his lung weakness, Harry made a diplomatic departure and promised faithfully that he would look in on Delbert the same time next day. Delbert almost smiled when they said goodbye but it was like the grin on the face of a corpse. Self-delight put a spring into Harry's step as he went down the spiral stairs, and during the 29-floor elevator descent he perfected the details of his revised plan.

Hadn't there been a sign VISIT OUR GARDEN SHED in

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the window of that MiniSuper-Mart? Garden Shed probably meant he could buy a good stout rope in Sampson's. He swung blithely through the mirrored lobby and as he let himself out he said, "Working hard, old-timer?" "Not bad, Mr. Grlugg," the ancient doorman replied.

He had been standing for five minutes waiting his turn in the long line of shoppers in front of Sampson's checkout counter, a length of rope coiled around his forearm, when suddenly a young man weaving through the aisles strode full-tilt into him and knocked him halfway to the floor. The young man looked about 20, with long sandy hair curling over his ears, and he wore a stained white workjacket with the store's name stitched over the breast pocket. "Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, sir," he apologized. "Here, let me help you with that rope."

As they bent together over the task the young man said, in a whisper inaudible to anyone else above the noise of cash registers and chattering customers, "Happy holiday, cousin Harry. You haven't killed him yet, have you?"

Harry's eyes ballooned in consternation and fright. He froze in his hunkered position and tried to think of something nonincriminating to reply.

"I'll be in the dirty chartreuse Toyota in the back lot," the young man whispered. "Meet me." He handed the coil of rope back to Harry and walked toward the rear of the store.

A few minutes later the youth reached across the stick shift of his car and offered a diffident Harry his hand. "Let me introduce myself. Clyde Bream. You may call me Clyde. I'm your third cousin four times removed or something. Yours and Delbert's."

"My name is Smyth, Roger Smyth—" Harry began feebly.

"Oh, come off it, cuz. My dear sainted mother was a genealogy nut. She made me memorize our entire family tree and the physical characteristics of each branch. Man, with those beady panda eyes and that W. C. Fields nose and those flabby jowls and floppy earlobes you are a Hokinson if ever there was one! And the last time I looked there was only one in that branch of the family left alive, and that must be you, cousin."

Harry tried desperately to change the subject. "What are you doing working in a grocery three blocks from Delbert Coombes?" he demanded.

"Oh, the same thing you're doing, I imagine, only I've been at it longer. Did you kill him,

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by the way? No, you wouldn't be in need of that rope if you'd just made yourself a millionaire. Look, I think we'd better coordinate our operations, as we used to say in the Army, before we foul each other up. What say we form a partnership? Even-steven split."

Harry saw certain advantages in a temporary alliance. "All right, Clyde, you're on, buddy. Shake on it." They gripped each other's hands like comrades in a noble cause. "I punched out on the time clock just now, only have to work half a day today," Clyde went on. "Let's drive while we talk."

He gunned the Toyota out of the lot and along West Boulevard across the near-empty city and out into the wooded countryside, filling Harry in on his recent history while he drove. "So after I bagged my share of gooks in Nam, I got out and started law school up in the Northwest on my GI Bill. I took a course in Wills and Administration and learned about a famous case they have in this state called *Kunkle v. Gucci.*

"And then when cousin Delbert's mess hit the headlines I saw that with a little American initiative I wouldn't have to waste my life as an overworked legal hack. So I took a leave of absence for a semester and moved here, found out where Delbert ordered his groceries, got myself a delivery-boy job, and waited for the right moment. And it came, cuz, it came!"

"You've, uh, got a plan?"

"Had one."

"Uh, how are you going to work it?"

"Naughty naughty. I plead the Fifth. Well, okay, I'll give you one hint. Did you see the city dump we passed a few miles back?" Harry nodded. "I went out there a few nights ago to throw away a set of works. You know what a set of works is?" Harry shook his head. "Narcotics paraphernalia. And I've never shot up in my life, not even in Nam. That's for misfits with no goal in life. There's your clue. Now you tell me what you've been doing."

Harry could make nothing of Clyde's hint but saw no alternative to unburdening himself and proceeded to do so while the Toyota sped along the deserted two-lane highway through the low hills. At the end of Harry's recital Clyde Bream grinned boyishly at him. "Good planning, cuz, quick thinking on your feet. You might have made a good lawyer. But I don't think you're going to need that rope."

"Why not?" Harry demanded peevishly.

"Did I tell you I was a

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pharmacy major in college before they drafted me? Thought I could talk them into making me a prescription clerk in a PX but they put me into a helicopter gunship outfit. Hey, cuz, what's wrong with you? You look kind of sick all of a sudden."

"Ugh—stop the car—need air." Clyde braked and pulled onto the gravel shoulder of the deserted road. Harry was bent double, his head between his knees, groaning. Clyde leaned over to help him.

Clyde never straightened up. Harry E. Hokinson whipped the combat knife from his ankle sheath and plunged it deep, thrusting upward in the approved commando style. After five stabs he was certain his young cousin was dead. Bloody flecks dribbled from his mouth and his eyes were glazed and wide-open. "Greedy little jerk," Harry grunted, his pig eyes gleaming. "Who needs you? The partnership's over."

He pushed the body away before it could bleed on his clothing. When the body was slumped over the wheel to Harry's satisfaction he manipulated the passenger door handle with his coat sleeve and squeezed himself out, being very careful not to touch anything inside the car. He basked in the glow of his own professionalism, like a young Green Beret back from his first dangerous mission. Just before he kneed the door shut he remembered to retrieve the coil of rope from the back seat.

The next item of business was to put as much distance as possible between himself and the chartreuse Toyota, just in case a patrol car should stop to investigate the vehicle parked on the shoulder. He had a long walk ahead of him but he decided that his new status as Delbert Coombes's sole surviving relative was worth the investment of sweat.

He struck out for the wooded hills and tramped through the autumn countryside for half an hour until he felt safe, then slowed his pace. He was sweating freely despite the crisp coolness of the day, and his stomach had begun to bother him. "You're out of shape, pal," he told himself, and resolved to get back in condition by jogging daily through the grounds of the Detweiler estate once it had legally become the Hokinson estate.

His walk slowed to almost a crawl and his stomach ached fiercely now. He hoped that the pain was not a reaction to the act of justifiable life-taking because it would suggest he might not have the guts to hang Delbert from the oak rafter. "But

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if I bug out now," he told himself, "I'll be a house painter the rest of my life."

That specter gave him the courage to go on. He resolved to carry out his plan, but tomorrow, after a good long rest tonight. God, how he needed rest! He trudged on through the gold-brown woods. His head buzzed. The forest seemed to be whirling. He had to stop and catch his breath every few minutes. His stomach was doubling him up.

He stumbled to the ground and propped himself against a thick spruce, using the rope coil as a pillow. He rubbed his unbearably aching belly and gasped for breath.

And suddenly four sentences came alive in his mind with the clarity of a noonday sun.

Delbert Coombes: "I had the delivery boy from Sampson's drop off some groceries a few days ago."

Clyde Bream: "I found out where Delbert ordered his groceries, got myself a delivery-boy job."

Clyde again: "A few nights ago I threw away a set of works. Narcotics paraphernalia."

And Clyde again: "I was a pharmacy major in college."

"Oh, my God!" screamed Harry E. Hokinson into the forest. "Oh, God, no! He injected poison into the fruit he delivered to Delbert! The orange!"

An unbiased observer might have pointed out that Clyde's scheme had failed to take into account the necessity to make Delbert's death seem an accident or a suicide and hence was far less professional than Harry's plan. But there were no observers in the vast autumnal loveliness of the forest and Harry died alone, badly.

And since both Clyde and Harry had carried on the family tradition of dying intestate, Delbert Coombes shortly found himself the owner of a set of lawbooks, a dirty chartreuse Toyota with blood-smeared seat covers, a secondhand BMW, a storeful of house paint, and a gross of combat knives. A week later Delbert scrawled a holographic will leaving all he possessed to The Flat Earth Society, smashed a table through the sealed French door of his penthouse, and stepped off the roof into nothingness.

"Q"

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a NEW crime story by

JOAN RICHTER

"The weaver birds, startled from their basket nests, darted among the branches of the thorn tree. The African watched them, fluttering like helpless flowers caught in a storm, and wondered what tomorrow would bring . . ."

A MATTER OF JUSTICE

by JOAN RICHTER

The African sat behind the big desk and stared through the slanting blinds of the open window. The air was hot and humid, but he was used to it. In earlier years he had lived inside the stifling uniform of a policeman—the starched twill tunic, the heavy holster and high shoes with leg bindings that left lines on his flesh at the end of the day, like the markings a snake made on dusty ground.

When he'd become an official of the new government, he left the police force and discarded its uniform. He was comfortable in the wide-necked, loose-sleeved robe that fell to his ankles and revealed large feet with big toes that moved freely in sandals made of antelope skin.

A small breeze stirred and the blinds moved lazily against the window frame. His eyelids lowered and lifted, clearing his vision, enabling him to take in a wider view of the yard surrounding the government building. Two Jeeps were parked beside a Landrover and on the other side of the red hibiscus he could see the gray Toyota.

Directly opposite the window there was a thorn tree strung with the basket nests of weaver birds. Each morning they were out in great numbers, flitting and twittering among the branches—so many that the tree seemed as though it were in flower, each bird a yellow blossom. They were gone now, but they would be back at nightfall and again tomorrow morning.

Sometimes he wondered

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what his life would have been like if he had been born at another time. Not ten years earlier, or ten years later; but fifty years earlier or later. The past was not so easy to recall, but it was far more difficult to imagine the future. Sometimes it was impossible to know what the next day would bring. Yesterday, for example, he would not have guessed the decisions facing him now.

The approaching sound of a motor touched his hearing and he leaned forward, cocking his left ear to the window, attentive and listening. He could tell that the vehicle had not yet reached the bridge by the grove of mango trees, but he recognized the rattle of the truck's worn body and in his mind he saw its rusted blue fenders. It was the truck he was waiting for, owned one time by a European chicken farmer who had used it to transport live fowl. This morning it had been sent to round up Asians.

As the African looked out of the window and listened to the sound of the truck growing nearer, he wondered if all men were alike—or if his uncertainty, his questioning, were different—if it made him weaker. He knew some men did not stop to think before they acted. Did they have regrets later?

He looked across the yard and read the sign that was nailed to the trunk of one of the trees. THIEVERY WILL BE PUNISHED BY PUBLIC DEATH.

In recent months robberies and thefts of all kinds had begun to sweep the country like a plague and the government had grown impatient with its inability to cope with them. It had been decided that the severest of punishments must be meted out and an example set. The message had been posted everywhere, nailed to fences and trees, to the sides of buildings. Executions were held daily.

When the truck rattled into the yard he looked away. He did not need to watch to see what was happening. It was all there in his mind. He waited for the squeak of the doors and for the clamor of the Asians seeking air, for dozens of feet padding on dusty ground. In a few moments he heard the front door of the building swing open and the murmur of voices in the outer room. Then the knock came.

"The Asians are here."

He hesitated for just a moment. "Send the shopkeeper in."

The door opened and a guard pushed in a small oily-haired man in a dirty white suit. His beady eyes held the

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frightened, cunning look of a jackal. The African stared at him and felt the saliva in his mouth turn bitter.

"Let me see your passport."

The Asian's mouth opened, but then quickly closed as he reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and withdrew the document.

"This says you are a British subject."

"Yes, I—"

"At Independence you chose to remain a British subject. Why? You have lived here most of your life. You made your money here. You have children who were born here."

The African slowly rose behind his desk. He was a big man. Before him the Asian was a frail pitiful figure. "Why? I want an answer. I want you to tell me. Speak." His voice had begun softly, but rose with each word, growing louder, until the last word was an explosion in the small room.

The Asian trembled, but it gave the African no joy. If they had been equals, perhaps. But they had never been. Once it was he who had trembled before this small quivering man. And it was the recollection of that time and others like it that brought the bitter taste into his mouth. Their roles were reversed now. But there was no pleasure.

"Speak, I say. Tell me why the land that made you a rich man, that kept you in women and food and gave you sons, was not the country you chose to pledge your allegiance to."

The shopkeeper's lips twisted and his hands fluttered at his sides. The cunning was gone from his eyes.

"You have no answer? Then I will give you one. Fear. But why are you afraid? What have you done that should make you fear an African government?" He came from around his desk, his hands clasped in front of him. And the Asian backed away, lips trembling, fingers clenching at his sides.

"What are you afraid of? What can I do to you that you did not at one time do to me? Shall I pick you up by your coat collar and throw you out the window and call you thief?"

Terror leaped in the small man's eyes.

"In those days I was not so big as I am now. I was only a child. Your clothes were clean and new and mine were dirty rags from a missionary's barrel. I had one shilling in my pocket and I came to your shop to buy some rice. You called me evil names and said I smelled like an animal. You took the shilling from me but gave me only a half shilling's worth of rice.

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When I tried to take what was due me, you threw me out on to the street, calling me a thief. I was beaten over the head."

The African looked away, out the window and across the yard to where the weaver birds were nesting. His heart was pounding and his head was beginning to ache. Tomorrow morning the birds would be back looking like yellow flowers in the thorn tree. What else would tomorrow bring? What unknown thing? What regret?

He looked at the man quailing in front of him and the African wondered why he was so indecisive in using the power that was now his.

He went back to his desk and sat down. He picked up the Asian's passport, opened it, then closed it. He folded his hands and looked up. His decision was half made.

"Two and a half months ago the goverment decreed that all Asians who had chosen not to become citizens of this country must leave within three months' time. Why have you not left?"

"There is nowhere to go."

"There is Britain. You are still a British subject. This says so." The passport was tight in his hand.

"But there is a waiting list."

"You have no time to wait. The three months are almost up."

"What will happen to those of us who do not leave?"

"That has not yet been decided. But whatever, it will not be pleasant. Would you like to stay? Is that your choice?"

A flicker of cunning returned to the Asian's dark eyes. It was what the African had expected.

"Yes, yes, of course," the shopkeeper said.

"Perhaps you could buy your right to stay. I am surprised you have not thought of that."

"But I have. And I have paid, but—"

The African looked away from the sorry figure in front of him, to the window again, and his eyes fastened on the sign. THIEVERY WILL BE PUNISHED BY PUBLIC DEATH.

"Who did you pay? And what did he promise you?"

"I do not remember his name. But he promised me I would be allowed to stay in my house and keep my shop. That was last week. Then today the truck came."

"Perhaps you will have to pay again."

"But who? The man I paid took my money and did not keep his promise. He was a thief."

"A thief? Ahh . . . then he must be punished. Tell me his name and we will charge him

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with thievery and you can witness his execution in the yard." The African nodded toward the window. "Come here and look. There is a stone wall against which he will stand, alongside another man who will be executed today for the same crime. It will all take place in a few minutes. Come, look out the window."

With a faltering step the Asian walked around the desk, stood in front of the window, and looked outside. The African rose and gripped the Asian's shoulder. The small man whimpered and a squeal of terror dribbled from his mouth.

"I am only returning your passport," the African said quietly as he turned the man around, pulled open the white jacket's dirty lapels, and slipped the document into the inner pocket. "Now, then. The man's name—the man to whom you gave money and whom you call a thief. Tell me his name."

The beady eyes canted, wavered in an instant's hesitation. "His name is Saka."

"Saka," the African repeated softly, nodding. "You understand that by telling me this name I have no choice but to put this man to death?"

"He is a thief."

"Someone else has made the same claim—another Asian, like yourself. We have already apprehended Saka. He is the man scheduled to be executed against the stone wall outside."

The Asian's eyes shifted and his tongue flicked across his dry lips. "The money—did you find much money on his person?"

"A great deal. I have it here in an envelope on my desk. It is a pity that the person to whom it belongs will not claim it. Bribery is not a crime punishable by death, but the prison sentence is very long. I do not think the money is worth it."

The Asian bit his lips, and remained silent.

"I will show you, though." The African shifted some papers on his desk from one pile to another. "Just so you know how much money it was." He lifted the blotter and then turned over a book. Then slowly he looked up. "But why should it interest you? It is of no importance. And it is getting close to the time for the execution."

He rose and walked to the door that led to the outer office. The man who had brought in the Asian was standing guard outside.

"Take the shopkeeper and the others outside into the yard. Call the villagers. I will be there soon to give the order."

Alone again, the African walked to the window. He understood the rationale of the

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government. *All thieves must die. They must be executed as quickly as possible after their crimes have been discovered, executed publicly as a lesson to others. And there must be no exceptions.*

And there must be no exceptions.

Saka. The name whispered itself in his mind as he stood remembering.

It was Saka who had found him that day long ago when he had been cheated out of his fair share of rice and had been left half dead from the beating the Asians had given him. It was Saka who had swept up the grains of rice that had spilled from the paper bag into the street, so they would have something to eat. And it was Saka who had bathed his wounds in the river and carried him back to his village.

And now it was Saka who had been charged with thievery and who would die.

The African turned away from the window. The villagers had been called and were gathered in the yard waiting. The Asians, rounded up in the truck, were there, too, huddled together.

Saka stood alone, his hands tied in front of him, his back to the stone wall.

The African stepped out into the bright sunlight and walked across the yard. Few had come out of curiosity. Most would have preferred to stay away. They were there because the law demanded it. His gaze traveled over the expectant, fearful faces until he found that of the shopkeeper and saw him huddled with his kind, shivering in the heat.

Then with great effort the African turned toward the stone wall and looked into the eyes of his old friend. He continued to look into those eyes, while he spoke to the crowd and explained what it was that Saka had been charged with. He finished with the solemn pronouncement. "To steal from another man is a crime punishable by death. And so Saka will die."

He turned then, away from the face that would haunt him always. His gaze sought out the Asian. Slowly and deliberately he walked toward him, across the yard. When he was but a few feet away, he stopped and began to speak again, starting with a quiet voice that grew louder with each word, until his voice boomed in the quivering sunshine.

"You have stolen from men and from women and from children. You have thrived on their hunger. You have grown fat on their deprivation. Asian, I charge you with a life of

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thievery. And for that crime you will die today."

An ululating cheer rippled among the African villagers. A whimper trembled among the Asians. The shopkeeper fell to his knees and clutched at the hem of the African's robe. The big man reached down and pulled him to his feet, thrusting him toward a guard and motioning that he be taken to the wall.

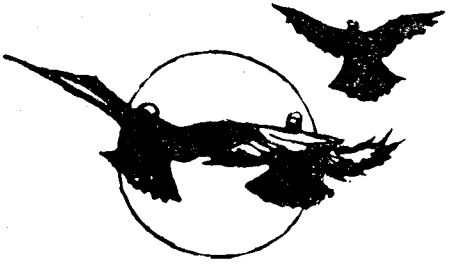
"You have no proof!" the Asian screamed.

The African spun around, his robe creating a cloud of dust on the ground. Until then he had not known of his full intent. But now he knew. "Search him. You will find the proof he is asking for."

The Asian clutched at his jacket as one of the guards tore it from his shoulders. The passport slipped from the inner pocket and fell to the ground. A white envelope fluttered out from between its pages and hundred-shilling notes fanned out into the dust.

"There is your proof," the African said and looked down at the envelope he had slipped between the pages of the passport.

In a moment the yard shuddered with the sound of gunfire. The weaver birds, startled from their basket nests, darted among the branches of the thorn tree. The African watched them, fluttering like helpless flowers caught in a storm, and wondered what tomorrow would bring . . .



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 386th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Every man should have a dream, something almost beyond his grasp, something almost unattainable; but such daydreams can be dangerous . . .

The author, Yvette M. Quiriy, was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, 51 years ago. In 1942 she joined the W.A.C. and spent much of her service in New Guinea and the Philippines. After that she attended art school for three years and earned her living as a proofreader for five years. Her hobbies include sketching and collecting books on the theater.

Surely there are tales of New Guinea and the Philippines to tell . . .

HIS LADY FAIR

by YVETTE M. QUIRIY

The 1965 Ford was about to pull away from the curb as Chester approached the large Victorian roominghouse. He froze in his tracks. Todd was behind the wheel and *she* was beside him. Chester stared, enraptured, until the car drove around the corner and was out of sight.

He hummed *It had to be you*, simultaneously taking the short flight of steps two at a time. This was something he rarely did, and as a result he found himself puffing.

He felt a strong surge of elation when he opened the door to his room and confronted the familiar assortment of photographs carefully thumbtacked to the four walls. Ann Sheridan, movie queen of the thirties and forties, had seized and held that territory for 35 years.

Draping his jacket around the back of a chair, Chester slid the knot in his tie down a couple of inches and unbuttoned his collar. Then settling himself in the large red easy chair, he lovingly contemplated the attractive young lady whose

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photographic presence overpowered even the strong odor of boiling cabbage seeping through the walls of his room.

I've found you, Ann, he thought. You can't elude me now. Often he would dream of how they would meet, of the conversations they would have, the evenings they would share. He had even taken dancing lessons. It wouldn't do not to be prepared.

And now I've met her! Well, he amended, I haven't exactly met her, but at least I've *seen* her!

Every day for the past week he'd seen his Ann with Todd. If Todd didn't live down the hall, he thought, I probably would have *never* seen her! With that unwelcome thought a shudder shook his lean body.

She had the same auburn hair, the same provocative smile that brightened all her photos. He was engulfed with a feeling of near fulfillment of his most cherished dream.

After his first unexpected glimpse of her he had taken more care with his appearance. He even bought a new blue blazer with silver buttons, wondering if *she'd* like it.

His thoughts gave him a thrill of pleasure as he bent forward and removed one shoe. He cocked his ear. Is that someone outside my room?

There was a knock, and Chester opened the door just in time for a fist to connect with his chin, causing him to rock back on his heels. As he hit the floor, he looked up into Todd's handsome face. Now, what was *that* for?

"If I ever catch you ogling my girl again, so help me I'll fix you for good!" Rubbing his knuckles, Todd glared at the man on the floor for a few moments, then stalked off.

Chester explored his jaw with his fingertips and worked his way to the comfort of his chair. Thank goodness my teeth are still intact, he thought; I can't afford new bridgework.

He'll never let me get near her, Chester thought despondently. What I need is a drink.

Opening the closet door, he reached blindly for the bottle of bourbon he always kept in a corner of the shelf. There was the sound of glass clinking against metal, and a dark object fell to the floor with a thud. He looked down at the Luger, shining in the circle of light from the lamp on the dresser. Stooping, he extended his fingers toward it. A souvenir of World War II, it had been all but forgotten. Expecting never to use it, he had kept it as a memento of the only memorable time in his life.

He poured himself a drink

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from the half-empty bottle, deciding there was more than enough to deaden the pain overtaking his face. As he drank slowly, his gray eyes darkened.

Running his long thin fingers over the barrel of the gun, he worked his jaw experimentally. He could hear muted laughter beyond his closed door.

He refilled his glass. After all these years—to find her—only to lose her. No! he wasn't going to let that happen. He resolutely got to his feet and walked toward the door. Opening it, he looked quickly in both directions, then started down the hall.

Cautiously he walked toward the sound of laughter. As he approached Todd's door, he heard her voice. Ann's voice! Enjoying its infectious sound, he stood with his body slightly bent, clutching the Luger firmly in his hand. It felt cold and impersonal, but somehow reassuring. His head felt light, but his heartbeat was remarkably steady.

He knocked on the door and heard Todd's deep young voice from within. "Now, who can *that* be?"

"There's one sure way of finding out," he heard her reply.

Chester knocked again, this time more forcefully. I'll get him the moment he opens the door, he planned. Then he heard her voice again. "I sure hope it's not that nut down the hall. Honestly, Todd, he gives me the creeps!"

At that moment the door opened and Chester saw Todd's eyes widen when he caught sight of the weapon.

"What the hell d'you think you're doing? Put that hardware away before it goes off!"

Chester rather enjoyed the look of fear on the younger man's face. He could see *her* standing in the center of the room, and for a moment he was enchanted. But the words—"that nut down the hall . . . he gives me the creeps"—kept roller-coastering through his brain.

You shouldn't have called me a nut, Ann, he thought as he aimed the gun at Ann's heart and squeezed the trigger.

"Q"

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"Q"

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 387th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .an interesting fictional debut that introduces an unusual detective—Captain Cork, a specialist in what he calls "social puzzles." The action takes place in the Eighteenth Century in the American Colonies, before the Revolutionary War. The author claims that Captain Cork is "the first Colonial op on record." (Wouldn't a James Fenimore Cooper character qualify as an earlier one? And Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner is close—he solved his "social puzzles" shortly after the Revolutionary War, in the Jeffersonian era.)

The author, S. S. Rafferty, is in his early forties, a native New Englander who grew up immersed in Colonial history. How could he escape it when he was raised only a few blocks from where the British came ashore to burn New Haven and has spent so many of his summers building sand castles on the site of the Battle of Compo Beach? "I had to pass Noah Webster's old house every day on the way to high school, and read his book every chance I got, since we were neighbors of a sort." With this background it is no wonder that Mr. Rafferty's first venture into fiction should involve the Colonial scene . . .

"Q"

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MURDER BY SCALPING; or, The Invisible Indian

by S. S. RAFFERTY

(The following is transcribed from the papers of Wellman Oaks, a former English bond slave, who lived in Connecticut between 1713 and the late 1750s. Some liberties have been taken with Oaks's original syntax, spelling, and the use of obscure colloquialisms to make his work more meaningful to the contemporary reader.)

It was the first time in my remembrance that Captain Cork and I were abroad in these Colonies without it costing him money for expenses, food, and travel. For once, *we* were guests, and we were not, thank Jehovah, involved in one of those "social puzzles" which so often divert the Captain's attention from profitable enterprise. Captain Cork calls them social puzzles; I label them nonlucrative excursions into the solution of murder, mayhem, and other forms of criminal skulduggery.

Ironically, our present sojourn at the Rhode Island home of Squire Norman Delaney was owing to a former case in which the Captain had ingeniously recovered the Squire's famous horse, the Narragansett Pacer. Eager to show his appreciation, Squire Delaney had written several times, urging a visit to his "ranch," as he called it. When the Captain finally accepted, I knew his motives were not vocational. Of late he had theorized that the Colonial diet could be improved if the present descending priorities of raising cattle for hide, tallow, and lastly, for meat, were reversed. No, Cork accepted Delaney's bidding because he loves good food and a chance to talk to an expert in any field.

The Delaney ranch was more like a plantation of the Carolinas than a New England farm. Located a few knots down from Point Judith, it featured acres of pasture land, an imposing Center Hall mansion, and, believe it or not, four separate houses of office. The Squire was a jocose Irishman with a plump wife and seven brawny sons who operated the ranch. This gave the Squire the leisure he required for the gentlemanly arts, with time left over for such minor municipal duties as keeping the peace between the

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Indians beyond the tree line and the frontier farmers.

The last about Indian affairs reminds me that I have forgotten to mention Tunxis, which is not easy to do. Tunxis is a tamed Quinnipiac, whose main employment is to serve as the Captain's shadow, even when the sun is not out. He goes everywhere with us. On the few occasions he has spoken to me, it has been in perfect English, but he is always jabbering away to Cork in aborigine. This usually leaves me in the dark about many matters, but I have learned to live with it. Just as I have learned to accept the fact that Tunxis will not sleep indoors at any time and that he takes a daily swim, even in mid-winter, which is a sight to shiver your liver. Needless to say, Tunxis was also a guest at Delaney's ranch—an outdoor guest by choice.

It was our third evening of relaxation at the ranch. We had supped well on a delicious bear's paw sauced in cranberries and had settled in for a cozy October night's conversation with pipes and bowl and glasses of usquebaugh, a Scotch-Irish corn liquor as potent as the Captain's own concoction, Apple Knock. I sat back and listened to these two fertile minds run the gamut of politics, enterprise, soldiering, women, and finally, as with all stout hearts well warmed by liquor, of philosophy.

"It is well to talk of good and evil," the Squire said, trickling the smoke from aside his clay stem, "but it's another thing to control it. Take crime, for example. Much of it in these Colonies is undetectable. I wouldn't hazard to guess how many culprits have committed foul deeds along this frontier and had them entered in life's ledger as accidents—people lost on the trail or taken by Indians. What stands in the criminal's way in these rude climes, I ask you, sir?"

"I do," Cork said. And he said it without pride or prejudice. "If all of us do in theory, some of us must do in practice."

I was thinking "practice and no profit" when Madame Delaney entered the parlour and announced a Mr. Goodman Stemple. It was prophetic that the discussion of the theory of crime should be interrupted by the reality of it. Stemple was a split rail of a man, made all the coarser by his buckskins and moccasins. But his backcountry appearance was belied by his educated speech. Although he was obviously agitated, he had himself under control, and addressed himself to the Squire. His tone was

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cool, but his tale was horrifying.

"It's a scalping, Squire, right in my own home—my own future son-in-law. There's talk among the trappers and frontier folk about raising a punitive expedition against the Tedodas, and I'm afraid the talk is getting out of hand."

I must say I admired Delaney's ability to sustain a shock and to rebound from it in a logical state. Indian uprisings were considered a thing of the past in these parts, a dark, bloody thing long forgotten.

"Let's have the details," the Squire said, bidding Stemple to a chair. He first introduced the Captain and myself, and the flicker in the frontiersman's eyes at Cork's name was an unspoken awareness of my employer's reputation.

As it turned out, Goodman Stemple was no light under a bushel in his own right. He was the owner of Stemple's Redoubt, a prosperous trading post that serviced upcountry trappers and farmers in barter, or truck, as it is called.

Although the Redoubt flourished and Stemple's family grew, his children were all female. Eight daughters and not one son. It was this dilemma that had led to the scalping.

Stemple's eldest daughter, Faith, was, at 18, beyond average marrying age, but her father had steadfastly refused offers for her hand from local farmers and woodsmen. Since he was without a male heir and was likely to remain so, he wanted his affairs to pass to a son-in-law of some brainpower. His wishes seemed hopeless, however, until the arrival of Donald Greenspawn, the son of a distant cousin who had settled and fared well in the Maryland Colony. Greenspawn brought with him a letter from his father, which explained in vague terms that the young man had gotten into a bit of trouble in the South, and that a new start in the North was advisable.

As Stemple saw it, one father's misfortune was another's gain, for Stemple planned to marry off Faith to the newcomer. The trader admitted to us that Greenspawn indeed had some faults. Like many of his kind, he was a dandy, with a superior attitude which did not sit well with Stemple's customers, but Stemple felt that time would temper the situation.

In the two months that Greenspawn had been at the Redoubt, there had been several problems with the Tedoda tribe, whose medicine man, Shellon, had accused the Southerner of short-counting pelts. This Stemple ignored, since he

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too had had run-ins with Shellon from time to time.

With this background, the trader brought us to the night of the tragedy, which proved to be more mysterious than we first had suspected. Greenspawn had been killed and scalped in a closed room, and the only person who could have done it was Faith Stemple herself—or an Indian who could walk through walls. Either conclusion was patently ridiculous, but no other was in the offing.

Just two days before his death, Greenspawn had agreed to take Faith in marriage. As is the custom, a period of courtship was begun, which, of course, included bundling. Now I must interpolate here that bundling is often misunderstood at home in England. Lascivious minds might smirk at the idea of an unmarried couple sharing a bed, with only a wide wooden board between them. However, the custom is quite practical and innocent.

Since the couples are occupied at chores all day, there is left only nightfall for private conversation. Cabins on the frontier usually have only one fireplace, in the main room, and that is reserved for the parents. Small children are tucked into unheated attics, and the only place left for an affianced couple was an unheated side room. Thus, on these cold winter nights, it was logical to send Faith and Greenspawn to bundle, fully clothed and protected from temptation by the bundling board and by Providence.

On the eve of the tragedy, the trader went on, a certain Vicar Johnson was visiting the Stemples and was asked to spend the night before continuing his journey north. He accepted, and was bedded down in the main room on a pallet just outside the room where Faith and Greenspawn had bundled. The Vicar, it so happened, was stricken with gumboils, and, unable to sleep, spent the night reading a volume of Cotton Mather's sermons by the light of the dying embers in the fireplace. This good man of the cloth could answer that no one entered or left the side room all night save Faith and Donald.

"And yet, by Moses, gentlemen, when my daughter woke, there was Donald Greenspawn dead in his side of the bed, his head stove in, and his scalp gone." Stemple's composure failed as he spoke, and Delaney quickly poured another usquebaugh and bid him to quaff it.

"Thank you, sir," he said, tossing it back to his gullet. "There he was, all bloody pated and covered with gold dust."

"Gold dust!" Cork sprang from his chair.

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"Yes, Captain, gold dust. All over his chest, the bed, and across the floor to the north wall. It was as if some spirit from the nether world had entered, done the foul deed, then left a trail of lucre behind him. It could only have been Indian magic, I swear. My little Faith would not harm a flea, much less scalp the man she was betrothed to."

"Astounding, eh, Cork?" the Squire said, relighting his pipe.

"What passes for astounding is often merely curious."

"You parry in the adjectival, Captain. If it's Indian trouble, I don't like it."

The comfortable appointments of the Delaney domicile were but a memory after 12 hours in the saddle. From long before sunup to almost dusk we had ridden through a panorama of this American country. We had left the beach and pushed inland past well plotted farms and villages and beyond into rude woods pocked with oasis-like clearings where hearty tillers of soil had thrown down the gauntlet to Nature.

As our journey had progressed, the woods thickened, the trails thinned, and I had the ominous feeling that I was riding closer and closer to the unknown. Finally, we broke through a cluster of elms to find ourselves in touch again with humankind. Ahead was the Redoubt, enclosed by a 12-foot-high stockade. Over its huge gate was a weather-worn hand-painted sign that read:

STEMPLE'S
GOODS AND WARES
FOR CASH OR TRUCK
THAT WILL ANSWER

Within the main enclosure was a large building and several smaller ones, all of log and mud-chinking construction. The large building, which served as Stemple's home, was a one-and-a-half-story house with a sloped roof wing attached. The wing was windowless, and I assumed it was behind these solid walls where Donald Greenspawn had met his Maker.

As we rode into the enclosure of the stockade, we saw a cluster of 30 or 40 men milling around one of the outbuildings which served as the trading post. They were woodsmen and farmers, all armed to the teeth with steel muskets and powder horns. The sight of Squire Delaney brought them forward as we dismounted.

"It was the militia you should 'a brung, Squire," said one of them, a bearded man with a tomahawk at his belt. "Them Tedodas don't need a talkin' to, just a good lickin'." His statement brought grunts of approval from the group.

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"Let's not get a lather up before we see what the trouble is, Delly Tremont, and that goes for the lot of you." The Squire continued with his chiding which was proving to be a fine piece of diplomacy, when I noticed Cork disappear through the door of the main house. Withdrawing from the group as inconspicuously as I could, I followed him and entered what was the main room of the Stemple abode.

It was not unlike the rooms in other backwoods cabins. To the left there was a dining board, and to the right several chairs were scattered near the fire. Two women sat holding each other's hands, while a man read to them from the Good Book. I had no trouble deducing that these were Goodwife Stemple, her daughter Faith, and the Vicar Johnson, although the latter startled me. I had expected a wizened old clergyman, infirm from gumboils, and yet here was a strikingly handsome youth no more than two or three years out of Divinity School. Goodwife Stemple's head was bowed at the holy words, but Faith looked straight into the Vicar's face, as if drawing warmth from his aesthetic countenance.

An open door to the far right led us into the murder chamber, where Cork became busy examining the body, and Tunxis prowled around on all fours, like a bloodhound.

The sight of Donald Greenspawn in death was not pleasant. But even had he been lying there alive and unwounded, I would have been taken aback.

Where Stemple had led us, or at least me, to believe that Greenspawn was a lad, such was not the case. Despite his disfiguration, I could see that he was a grown man in his late thirties. His body, now rigid in death, had in life been dissipated and flaccid.

While I stood mutely in the background, Cork directed his attention to the gold dust on the earthern floor. He fingered it for a few seconds and then said something to Tunxis in aborigine. The Indian nodded and left the room. I swear by heaven I am going to learn Indian talk one of these days and surprise the two of them. But Indian talk or not, I had some suspicions of my own.

"Perhaps we had better examine someone to see if he really has gumboils," I said slyly to the Captain.

"Excellent idea, Oaks," he responded. "Perhaps I could get the Vicar to sing us a psalm or two while you peek into his mouth."

I knew he was jibbing me, but I let it pass. I thought at the

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moment that he was a bit ruffled that his own yeoman had so quickly come to the heart of the matter.

Cork left the bundling chamber and strode across the main room without stopping, until he was outside the house. And as always, I was right behind him.

The Squire's early diplomacy was eroding into anger as he held off the verbal attacks of the countrymen. The mob quieted, however, as Cork walked into its midst. Most groups do, because a six-foot-six giant with a grandee's barba and a plumed Cavalier's hat always commands attention.

"Goodman Stemple," he asked the trader in a loud voice, "who among these gathered here has ever asked for your daughter's hand?"

There were groans and a giggle or two from the group.

"Practically every man Jack of them, Captain. Jeb Howard there, and his brother Pete, Win Goulding and Tappins here. Just about everyone, even old Delly Tremont." As Stemple pointed to the bearded man, hoots were heard from the rest. Tremont did not like it and gripped his musket as if to menace one and all.

"Seems to be you're all turned mighty merry when we got murderin' Injuns about," he said.

"You are right, Mr. Tremont," said the Captain. "This is no time for jollity. You look like a man who knows his way with the redman, Tremont."

"He should," Stemple said. "That's how he got his name. Lived with the Delawares for five years, didn't you, Delly? Best trapper in these parts."

The bearded man relaxed a bit under the flattery and Cork went on, "The Delawares! Well, my compliments, sir. You learned a great deal along that great river's banks, did you not? I'll wager you are quite a fisherman, Tremont."

It all happened so quickly that it still boggles my mind to reconstruct the scene. As Cork talked, I didn't notice Tremont's trigger finger, but as he swung to fire on the Captain, Tunxis's knife smashed into Tremont's chest, deflecting the muzzle blast to the ground. I later estimated that the Indian had hit his target from at least twenty feet.

"Tremont's method was obvious from the first," Cork told us later that day as Goodwife Stemple served us a piping-hot corn pudding and generous cups of hard cider. "He was enraged at the thought of being spurned by Faith, and sought vengeance on Greenspawn."

"But such an elaborate plan for a crude backwoodsman!"

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"I don't think it was a plan, Squire. It was luck and everyone's ignorance that brought the Indian scalping into it. Tremont lurked about that night, and when all was quiet, he removed some of the dry mud chinking from between the logs of the north wall. It could easily be replaced and be dry by morning. Using an arrow attached to a tag line, he killed his victim as the Delawares catch fish, harpoon fashion.

"But when he tugged his line to retrieve the arrow from Greenspawn's head, he found he had caught more than death. You see, a close examination of Greenspawn showed me that this vain man was somewhat bald, and wore a wig piece, as is fashionable on the Continent. When the arrow was retrieved, the wig came with it—hence, the look of a scalping."

"And the gold dust, Captain?" Stemple asked.

"I suggest that you examine your strong box, Stemple. I think you'll find that your coins have been cleverly shaved since Greenspawn's arrival. And what better place to hide his ill-gotten gains than in the lining of a wig nobody even suspected he wore."

"So when everyone jumped to the conclusion that it was a scalping and Indian magic, Tremont just sat back and let the mystery grow," Stemple said.

"Yes, just as you jumped to the conclusion that Greenspawn was a man of quality. I think after Faith's harrowing experience, you might consider a man of the cloth for her."

Many months later I read of the couple's wedding in the Boston *Weekly Gazette.* When I showed it to Cork, he unkindly reminded me that I had suspected the Vicar. It was one of those times when I wished I spoke aborigine and he didn't. Cork and Tunxis would have got an earful.

"Q"

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a NEW Photographer story by

JAMES HOLDING

The Photographer is back, in perhaps the strongest (and we have used the word advisedly) story in the series—The Photographer, a killer for hire, a curiously fastidious assassin who abhors the word "murder," who insists on it being called "nullification." And this time The Photographer is given a double assignment, the first part of which is to solve one of the most bizarre and brutal multiple murders in the history of homicide.

Brutal . . . this story is not, we warn you, for the squeamish. It is a horrifying story. But sometimes the horrifying, even the revolting, has an almost irresistible fascination . . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE BUTCHER

by JAMES HOLDING

When Manuel Andradas discovered that all five of The Butcher's victims were uniformly ugly, were wearing topazes when they died, and moved in the same social circles as Floriano Fonseca, he knew that he had found out who The Butcher was. The identity of the madman who had slit the throats of three women and two men in less than a month, and unleashed a reign of terror in Rio, was suddenly made clear to him.

He first felt surprise, then doubt, then a surging satisfaction as the bits of knowledge gleaned from his amateur researches pointed inexorably to the murderer. For he now knew something that neither the police nor The Big Ones, with all their resources, had been able to discover. And to Manuel Andradas, The Photographer, that knowledge was worth 100,000 cruzeiros.

It had begun yesterday in the usual way.

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Rodolfo had arranged a meeting at the restaurant called A Cascatinha in the Forest of Tijuca. The restaurant was a mere barbecue stand, a cheap *churrascario;* yet being situated in a quiet wood in the middle of Rio it was convenient and private. Rodolfo had ordered some barbecued ribs. The Photographer was content with a thimble-sized cup of coffee.

"You have an assignment for me?" he had asked Rodolfo.

Rodolfo chewed noisily; barbecue sauce stained his long rubbery lips. He nodded.

"A nullification?" That was Manuel's own word for his second profession. To him it was more dignified than the word "murder."

Roldolfo wiped his lips. "It is a common criminal this time," he said with a derisive grin, "so you should have no qualms."

"Qualms?" Manuel looked distastefully at his only contact with The Big Ones. "Have you ever known me to have qualms? I don't let emotion interfere with business."

"If the price is big enough, true."

"Who is this criminal you want me to nullify?"

Rodolfo looked warily about him. He leaned toward Manuel and said softly, "The Butcher."

Manuel stared at him in surprise. "The Butcher? The man in the newspapers who has slit the throats of several Cariocas? And mutilated them afterwards?"

"That is the one."

"I thought the police would handle that one."

"They cannot," said Rodolfo, "because they cannot discover his identity. They have tried desperately for three weeks now—ever since his first murder—without success. Hence, they have come to us." Rodolfo was complacent.

"The *police* have become a client of The Big Ones?" Manuel couldn't believe it.

"They have. Because of our wide underworld contacts, as they put it delicately."

Manuel laughed. "There is irony there somewhere, if I may say so."

"Undoubtedly." Rodolfo shrugged narrow shoulders. "But convincing proof, all the same, of the power of The Big Ones in Rio. Even the police must come to us to get their difficult jobs done, you see?"

"This Butcher is one of your own, then? A member of the Big Ones?"

Rodolfo shook his head vigorously. "No, he is not one of ours. God forbid."

"Then who is he?"

"We don't know."

Manuel snorted incredulous-

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ly. "You mean you have accepted payment from the police to nullify The Butcher for them and you don't even know who he is?"

"No payment has been accepted. We will be paid only if we succeed in identifying and removing The Butcher from circulation. And can prove it, of course, to the satisfaction of the police."

"Then you don't need me yet." Manuel sipped his coffee.

"We need anyone who can help us. The word has gone out to every member of the brotherhood. To identify The Butcher for us—with proof—will be worth fifty thousand cruzeiros to whoever does it. To destroy The Butcher—with proof—will be worth another fifty thousand."

"A hundred thousand," murmured Manuel. Even by his standards it was very liberal. "The police must have offered The Big Ones at least a quarter of a million, then."

"That is no concern of yours. The public outcry has brought such pressure on the police to capture The Butcher that quick success is essential to them—at any price. So we have informed all our people."

"I am not one of your people."

"True. But we offer you the same proposition."

"Why?" asked Manuel. "I am a nullifier, yes. But not a detective."

Rodolfo put his right hand into his jacket pocket. He said, "I am pointing a revolver at your belly at this moment, Photographer, under the table between us. It is a precaution only, please understand me."

Manuel froze. "A precaution against what?"

"In case you may feel insulted at my next words and attack me."

Manuel was amused. "Say your words, Rodolfo. It is hard to feel insulted when a gun points at one's belly."

"Very well, then. Here is the truth. The Big Ones believe you are better equipped to nullify The Butcher, when identified, than any of our own people. You have proved your ability in that respect to us many times."

"So?" Manuel preened himself a little. "This calls for a gun in my belly?"

"Not that. This. The Big Ones also believe you are better equipped than any of our own people to find out who The Butcher is, as well."

"Why so?"

"Because you, yourself, are so very much like him," said Rodolfo quietly.

"Oh," growled Manuel, his muddy brown eyes suddenly more threatening than the gun

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in Rodolfo's pocket. "You think I am mad, then. For The Butcher is obviously mad. Is that it?"

"Wait! I said you might feel insulted. But let me finish. Remember, please, my gun—and the hundred thousand cruzeiros at stake in this matter. As I say, The Big Ones believe that you and The Butcher are two of a kind. Both—pardon me—heartless, merciless killers who seem to *enjoy* killing. Both, on your records, totally without remorse or pity. Both clever enough to make fools of the police at will. And as for madness, Photographer"—Rodolfo took a tighter grip on his gun—"you must admit that your obsession with money sometimes borders on madness." Rodolfo took a deep breath. "Am I not right?"

Manuel said nothing.

Rodolfo went on, "So it is at least a possibility, we think, that you might quickly discover The Butcher for us. Like calls to like. Isn't that what they say? You may even know The Butcher's name at this moment, for all we can tell."

The Photographer grunted contemptuously.

"There, now," Rodolfo said. "I have delivered The Big Ones' message, anyhow." He watched The Photographer with a half smile on his lips but his hand still in his jacket pocket. "What do you say?"

Manuel's opaque gaze seemed to look beyond Rodolfo. After the space of five long breaths he shrugged and said, "No man likes to be called mad, Rodolfo. Yet for a hundred thousand cruzeiros I will even suffer that. Yes. Tell The Big Ones that I shall do my best for them. To identify, as well as nullify, The Butcher. Meanwhile, I presume I get the usual one-third in advance?"

Rodolfo relaxed. "No, I regret it, you do not. This time our client, the police"—he snickered at the thought—"insists on performance before payment. We must supply them with proof of The Butcher's death before we get a single cruzeiro. So we naturally cannot give you an advance. You understand our position?"

"Not even a few cruzeiros for expenses?"

"Not even that," said Rodolfo, removing his hand from his pocket and picking up a barbecued rib. He knew he was in no danger now. When The Photographer began to haggle over money, which he loved better than anything else in the world, Rodolfo knew he was temporarily harmless.

Floriano Fonseca was an interior decorator, handsome,

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urbane, prosperous, well-connected, and still single. He lived in an exquisitely appointed penthouse apartment behind Copacabana beach, an apartment which he had decorated himself as a showcase for his talents.

Manuel had photographed this apartment two years before, in color, to illustrate an article on the decorator which had appeared in Brazil's foremost society magazine, *Rio Illustrated.* It was therefore with a sense of familiarity that he stepped off the elevator and pushed the buzzer at Fonseca's door.

Manuel's camera case was slung over his left shoulder. A tiny derringer was concealed in the palm of his left hand. And a throwing knife, no larger than a bougainvillea petal and similarly shaped, was lightly bound to his right forearm under his jacket sleeve.

Floriano Fonseca opened the door. He was clad in a loose dressing gown of honey-yellow brocade, picked out with gold thread, and was smoking a cigarette in an amber holder. When he recognized Manuel, his face wreathed into a welcoming smile and he exclaimed, "Senhor Andradas! How nice to see you again!" He stepped back invitingly. "What brings you to see me this time, with your clever cameras? Surely not another article for *Rio Illustrated?*"

"No," said Manuel, stepping into the foyer, "this time I have another assignment which I hoped I could discuss with you, since it is closely concerned with esthetics and good taste."

"I am flattered," said Fonseca, his smile widening. "Please come in and let me offer you some port while we have this discussion of yours."

Manuel followed him into the large living room he remembered—a serene haven high above the city and harbor, done in soft shades of yellow, tan, and brown, and breath-takingly beautiful in the mellow glow of the lamps.

Fonseca poured port for them both. Manuel settled himself in a straight chair, placing his camera case on the floor beside him but retaining the derringer in his palm.

He accepted his port with his right hand, and when Fonseca sat on a velvet sofa opposite him and lifted his glass in a polite gesture, Manuel returned the courtesy and sipped appreciatively.

"Now, then," said his host, putting out his cigarette in a marble ashtray, "what do you wish to discuss with me, Senhor Andradas?"

Manuel hesitated briefly.

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Should one be devious and subtle with a man almost certainly demented? Or was the blunt straight-forward attack to be preferred? The Photographer didn't know. So he settled for the direct approach, since that was more in keeping with his own nature. He said, "I need your advice, Senhor Fonseca, about this fellow the newspapers call The Butcher. Have you read of his crimes?"

"Certainly," said Fonseca easily. "Who in Rio has not?" He patted his lips delicately with a pale yellow handkerchief that matched his blond hair. "But esthetics and good taste—weren't they the words you used?—what have they got to do with this Butcher person?" Fonseca made a moue of distaste but he seemed amused.

"Everything," Manuel replied. "They have everything to do with The Butcher. For it is my belief that his crimes have been committed in *defense* of esthetics and good taste. Out of a unique and profound devotion to beauty, you might say."

"Indeed?" said Fonseca with obviously deep interest. Had his eyes widened a trifle? Manuel could not be sure. "What a marvelous motive for murder! If I, myself, were ever to kill anyone, Senhor Andradas, I like to think that it would be for just such a reason as that."

"That was my conclusion also," Manuel said slowly. "That is how I discovered that you are The Butcher."

Manuel dropped his empty glass, as though by accident, so that his throwing hand would be unencumbered. His left hand tensed around the derringer.

Needlessly, it seemed. For Fonseca made no move toward violence. Instead, he threw back his handsome head and laughed. The laughter tinkled in the room with the brittle sharpness of glass fragments shattering on a pavement. Even to Manuel, it had an eerie sound. Fonseca finally gasped, through his laughter, "You're not joking?"

The Photographer shook his head solemnly. "I am not joking, *perdao.* I say that you, Floriano Fonseca, are The Butcher." Encouraged by the ambiguous expression of his host, he added persuasively, "Tell me the truth, Senhor Fonseca. You *are* the Butcher, aren't you?"

It was as easy as that. Fonseca showed his teeth in a delighted grin. "Of course I'm The Butcher," he said matter-of-factly. "How clever of you to ferret me out! The police couldn't do it. I've fooled them from the beginning." He sounded as proud of himself as the last child to be caught in a game of hide-and-seek.

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"You fooled us all," said Manuel, trying to keep his breathing steady.

Fonseca sobered. "Except you, it seems, Senhor Andradas."

"Me, too. Until the police offered a large reward for your identity."

"A reward? Really?" He was pleased. "I have reduced the mighty Rio police to that? They *must* be desperate. How much was the reward?" he asked eagerly.

"Two hundred thousand cruzeiros."

Fonseca's face fell. "Minuscule!" he said. "A mere pittance for the identity of a truly outstanding criminal. Don't you think so?"

Manuel smiled for the first time during their interview. "Yes," he agreed, "you are right. You are worth much more than two hundred thousand. I realized that when I discovered who you are."

"Thank you," said Fonseca gravely. "You seem to appreciate my gifts, even if the police do not. How *did* you find me out, may I ask?" The decorator was as humble in his request as a child asking a favor of his father.

"Quite simply," Manuel replied, willing to oblige The Butcher now that his death was inevitable. "I read the newspaper accounts of your murders. From these I gathered some interesting evidence. First, that none of your victims seemed to *expect* death. There was never the smallest sign of a struggle at the murder scene, no expression of fear or terror on the dead faces, so the papers reported. So I assumed, for the sake of a starting point, that they were killed by someone they knew and trusted, someone whom they invited into their homes."

"*Bom.*" Fonseca was nodding. "Very good. I knew them all and have liked them all in years past. That's why I struck them with this"—he drew a weighted leather blackjack from the pocket of his dressing gown—"before I killed them. To spare them unnecessary pain. Death came as a surprise to them, just as you guessed."

Manuel said, "Then, the mutilations. They were revealing, too. Ears and fingers sliced off and carried away, with the earrings and rings still on them."

"The mutilations and slit throats were punishments, nothing more," said Fonseca in an oddly deprecatory voice, "for unforgivable lapses in good taste."

Manuel nodded as though he sympathized with Fonseca's point of view. "Then, Senhor Fonseca, it occurred to me, as I

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was searching the back issues of *Rio Illustrated* for color pictures of your victims, that all five of these people you punished so severely were quite sensationally ugly. Of the three women one was grossly fat with oily, big-pored skin. One was a mulatto whose mixed blood was at war with her dark features. And the third had been lovely at one time, until a liver complaint left her with a complexion like an over-ripe side of beef."

Fonseca's eyes were shining with admiration. "Go on, go on! What about the two men?"

"They were ugly, too. One was a stooped and swarthy ancient who had dyed his few remaining hairs bright gold in attempting to stay young. The other, a black-haired man-about-town, used woman's makeup to try to conceal his yellow smallpox scars."

Fonseca clapped his hands as though at a play. "Good! You are a sharp observer! And what was the lapse in good taste deliberately committed by each of these ugly people? Did you deduce that, too?"

"That was what led me to you. Each of your victims was wearing jewelry on ears or fingers, leading the police to believe The Butcher's mutilations were merely a brutal form of robbery."

Fonseca said with dignity, "That was not my purpose, of course. I am not a common thief. You guessed that robbery was not my motive? How?"

"I was struck by the *kind* of jewels that adorned the missing ears and fingers. The newspaper reports were quite specific."

The Butcher nodded his approval. "You *are* clever," he said, like a teacher complimenting a promising pupil.

"In every case," Manuel went on, "your ugly victims were wearing topazes. Either topazes alone, or topazes combined with diamonds or emeralds or other gems. But in each case, topazes."

"Bravo!" said Fonseca. He laughed happily. "That was the master clue, was it not? The topaz jewelry?"

"It was. But only for me, you understand. For it led me to remember my former meeting with you when I photographed your apartment, and the conversations about the topaz we had while I worked here in this very room. And the article itself, in *Rio Illustrated*, which featured your almost violent preference for yellows, browns, tans, and golds in your decorating work—because these were the matchless colors of the topaz. Your favorite gemstone, you told me then, was the topaz. And you told me so with

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a mystical religious fervor that puzzled me at the time. All this means nothing to the police, of course. They have never seen this room. They have never read the article in *Rio Illustrated.* Above all, they have never heard the strange awed reverence in your voice when you utter the word 'topaz'."

Floriano Fonseca cut in as though on cue. "Yes, yes, the topaz!" Glaring amber shutters seemed all at once to slide down over his mild brown eyes. He spoke in a singsong monotone. "The topaz! It is beauty incarnate, I tell you. The divine gemstone that sanctifies Brazil, its blessed birthplace! Have you any idea what a topaz really is? It is precious gold, solidified yet translucent; it is liquid sunlight, poured foaming into a chalice of transparent rock; it is the gem fashioned by God especially for the adornment of beautiful people who are worthy to display its purity and magnificence!"

Saliva collected in the corners of his mouth and dribbled down his square chin. "The topaz is not for the ugly, Senhor Andradas. Not for unsightly people with sallow skins. Not for muddy-fleshed, slug-beige, repulsive travesties of human beauty. No, the topaz is for handsome brunettes whose skin is only slightly suntanned. It is for brown-eyed blonds with clear and glowing skins, like mine!"

The decorator cast a fond look at the ring finger of his left hand which was encircled by a heavy gold band in which a single large honey-yellow topaz was set. "If any but the worthy dare display the topaz on their persons, I tell you, they must be punished, severely punished! As I have already punished five of the arrogant clods!"

Fonseca jumped up and hurried into an adjacent room. In a moment he was back with a small closed tin box which originally had contained pretzels. It did not contain pretzels now. He opened the lid to disclose six human ears and four human fingers, still wearing jewels and already reduced to a pale paste color by the putrefaction of the flesh. Manuel could smell them when Fonseca held the tin box out for inspection.

"I have punished them, you see!" he shrilled. "Here is proof of their blasphemy!"

Now at last Manuel could believe that this man was mad—an insane, ranting, psychopathic killer. To hear him rave was to hear the horrid vaporings of a deranged brain. To see his grisly trophies was final proof that Floriano

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Fonseca was indeed The Butcher.

To his surprise Manuel found Fonseca somehow pathetic in this revealing moment. Yet he did not, for a single instant, forget the blackjack still dangling from Fonseca's hand. He said quietly, "So, then, I have won the police reward, it seems. You admit you are The Butcher."

"Why should I not?" Fonseca reseated himself on the sofa, placing the ghastly pretzel can on an end table beside him. "I am doing good and noble work."

"Do you know the penalty for murder?"

"Certainly. But I am confident I shall escape it. I am not your ordinary murderer, Senhor Andradas, remember that—not merely a criminal who kills for revenge or profit. Oh, no. I shall not be executed. My uncle has assured me of that."

Manuel sat up in his chair. "Your uncle?"

"My own parents are dead, so I go to my uncle for advice and counsel."

"Who is this uncle?"

"He is my mother's brother, Santos Peixoto, a lawyer. You may have heard of him. He is prominent."

Manuel suddenly caught the faint odor of money in that topaz-colored room. He said, "I know of Senhor Peixoto. He is indeed prominent. You say he has assured you that you will escape the death penalty?"

"Not that *I* shall escape it. The Butcher. For my uncle, of course, does not suspect that it is I who am The Butcher. But when I asked him if a demented man, as The Butcher seems to be"—Fonseca smiled a secret, superior smile—"would be put to death if captured by the police and convicted of the murders, he told me that The Butcher could undoubtedly escape the death sentence by pleading insanity."

Fonseca laughed merrily. "Far from being executed, therefore, I shall be coddled in an asylum somewhere—a private one, I am sure, when my uncle learns who The Butcher is. And thus I shall live in ease and comfort for the last years of my life, as my mother did. *She* went insane after my father died, you know. So you see, everything will work out for the best. When I have finished my work." The expression on Fonseca's face as he mouthed these words could be described only as angelic.

"I am sure your uncle is right," said Manuel, rising, and taking a step toward his host. He put admiration into his voice. "It was a stroke of noble pity to render your victims

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unconscious before you killed them, Senhor Fonseca," he said. "You punished them properly, yet you spared them, mercifully, the pain of punishment. May I see the admirable weapon you used so tenderly?" He held out his hand casually.

Fonseca gave him the blackjack. "I have always tried to temper justice with mercy," he simpered.

Manuel hefted the weighted leather in his hand. "It has a certain beauty of its own, has it not?" he murmured. With these words he swung the blackjack against Fonseca's temple.

The Butcher collapsed on the sofa like a bag of wet sand.

It was raining, with a heavy mist curling around the base of Sugar Loaf, when The Photographer left Fonseca's apartment at nine o'clock.

By ten he was ringing the doorbell of Senhor Santos Peixoto, Floriano Fonseca's uncle. A party was in progress at the prominent attorney's luxurious house near Gavea Golf Club. The sounds of gaiety came to Manuel through open windows.

He told the servant who answered his ring that he desired to see Senhor Peixoto on a matter of police business. He was shown into a richly furnished study, and there the lawyer came to him at once, a tall distinguished man with snow-white hair, craggy features, and ruddy coloring.

He invited Manuel to sit. Then, transparently anxious to get back to his guests, he inquired, "Is your matter pressing, Senhor? Can't it wait until tomorrow? I am engaged."

"It could wait until tomorrow," said Manuel, "but I think you would prefer to handle it tonight."

"Very well," said Peixoto. He seated himself. "Tell me."

"I have discovered the identity of The Butcher," Manuel said without preamble.

Peixoto's face lost a little of its high color. "What an astonishing announcement!" he exclaimed. "I fail to see why that fact, even if true, should interest me in the slightest." His tone was faintly defensive, Manuel thought. "Who are you, anyway? You told my butler you are from the police. Yet I do not recognize you."

"I said it was a police matter I came to discuss," Manuel replied, "which is an entirely different thing. I am not of the police. I have, however, earned a large reward from them for learning the identity of The Butcher."

"I know of no such reward. And I would know of it if it had been offered."

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"It was offered secretly. To The Big Ones. You are familiar with that name?"

Peixoto nodded impatiently. "A collection of racketeers and extortionists, North American style. And you're telling me that the police offered *them* a reward to catch The Butcher? This all sounds extremely unlikely to me, Senhor."

"To me, also. Yet it is the case. And although I'm only an unimportant informer for The Corporation, I've been lucky enough to stumble on the identity of The Butcher. So I have earned the reward."

"Good for you," said Peixoto, striving to maintain a calm bearing. "But why come to me about it?"

"Because The Butcher is your nephew, Floriano Fonseca. Is that reason enough?"

The lawyer said with a faintly hectoring air, "Ridiculous! My nephew? My nephew Floriano is not only extremely talented and successful in his decorating business, but also a gentle, normal, well-adjusted man. If you think Floriano Fonseca is The Butcher you must be mad!"

"No," said Manuel quietly. "I am not. But Floriano Fonseca is. And I think you suspect it."

Peixoto lit a cigar with a shaking hand. In his preoccupation he did not offer one to Manuel. He said, "Floriano . . ." and his voice trailed off. Then he rallied. "My nephew is *not* mad!" He said it loudly but without conviction.

"I beg you to be honest with me," said Manuel. "Have you ever noticed signs of dementia in him?"

Peixoto shook his head stubbornly and blew cigar smoke.

"Or noticed his strange obsession with certain colors, materials, decorations?"

No answer.

"Or been exposed, for example, to any of his odd ideas about topazes?"

Silence. The lawyer's countenance, wreathed in cigar smoke, mirrored growing agitation.

"Have you discussed The Butcher with him recently? When *he* brought up the subject? And perhaps showed an unhealthy interest in this psychopathic murderer?"

The lawyer remained silent.

With brutal directness Manuel asked him the key question. "Has anyone else in your family ever gone mad, Senhor Peixoto? A heritage of insanity might go far to explain The Butcher."

Peixoto groaned aloud. "Enough!" His face was now almost as white as his hair. "Enough, Senhor, I beg of you!

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I *have* sometimes suspected . . . how did you discover that my nephew—" He could not go on.

The Photographer explained in detail. When he was finished, the lawyer said in a lost voice, "Poor Floriano!" He gave Manuel a look of despair. "What follows for him now will be, first, arrest, I suppose. Then imprisonment. Public trial. Commitment to an asylum. Pain. Scandal. Disgrace. Sickening publicity. Not only for him but for me and my family as well." He sighed heavily. The sounds of party gaiety penetrating the study at that moment struck a macabre note.

Out of respect for the man's sorrow Manuel remained silent. There were tears in Peixoto's eyes, he noticed.

"However," the lawyer continued, "it is inevitable, I know that. There is no help for it."

Manuel held up a hand. "Wait. You asked me why I came to you. It was to offer you an alternative to all this misery you deplore—before I inform the police of The Butcher's identity."

Peixoto looked at him with distaste. "Blackmail, you mean?" he asked. "You think I shall pay you more to conceal The Butcher's identity than the police will pay you to uncover it? And leave a murderer, a madman, at large?"

"Not at all. You wrong me. Although money *is* a consideration, I will admit."

"Then what is this alternative you offer?"

"I can arrange for your nephew to escape the penalty for his deeds. I can prevent your family and your career from suffering as a result of your close kinship with The Butcher. I can even keep the world in ignorance of the fact that Floriano Fonseca, your nephew, is a raving homicidal maniac."

Peixoto stared at him as though Manuel, too, were mad. "How can you do that, in the name of God?" he demanded.

"By making Floriano Fonseca his own last victim."

"What?"

"By killing him in the exact manner in which he has been killing his victims. You see? He will never be exposed as The Butcher. Because to all appearances he will have been *killed* by The Butcher."

Peixoto's expression was a grotesque compound of horror, shock, and shrewd assessment. At length he whispered hoarsely, "You would slit his throat and mutilate him? Floriano?" His cigar had dropped to the floor unnoticed and was scorching the carpet.

"That would be more merciful than what the police

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have in store for him, don't you agree?"

"But to kill him deliberately—"

"Why not? He is a menace to society."

"You would do this yourself?"

"Certainly not. I can arrange it, though. The Big Ones handle such chores discreetly—if the fee is big enough."

At Santos Peixoto's next words Manuel released an inaudible sigh of triumph. For the lawyer asked, "How much?"

Manuel replied, "I would have to forego my share of the police reward if we agree on my alternative. As would my employers, The Big Ones. And the police reward for identifying The Butcher is a hundred thousand cruzeiros, Senhor Peixoto," Manuel lied with an expressionless face. "So I fear I could not arrange the alternative for less than two hundred thousand."

The magnitude of that sum did not seem to shake the lawyer unduly. Perhaps I should have asked for more, thought Manuel. Then the lawyer said, "That is a great deal of money to pay to an unknown man for a service which may never be performed."

"Think of it this way," The Photographer suggested. "Two hundred thousand is cheap—compared with the cost of a private asylum for your nephew after his conviction. As for the service, I guarantee it. And only after you *know*—through the newspapers—that it has been performed properly, do you need to pay for it. Satisfactory, Senhor?" Manuel arose from his chair and looked at Peixoto calmly.

The older man rose, too, and absent-mindedly stepped on the butt of his cigar, still smoldering on the carpet. "That will be satisfactory," he said evenly. "To whom shall I send my check? What is your name?"

Manuel hesitated. "You don't need to know my name. And no checks, if you please. Meet me at the main gate of the Botanical Gardens next Tuesday at three fifteen in the morning and bring the cash with you. By then I promise you that you will be sure I have earned it."

"Very well." The lawyer saw Manuel to the door. "And thank you, whoever you are. We thank you from the heart. All of us. *Muito obrigado.*"

The Photographer waved a hand. "*Ate logo.* Until Tuesday."

A telephone call brought Rodolfo to the *churrascario* in Tijuca Forest at noon two days

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later. Manuel was already seated at an out-of-the-way table, awaiting him.

Rodolfo sat down, a puzzled expression on his face. "What do you want?" he asked Manuel abruptly.

"Merely to report that your mission is accomplished."

"What!" Roldolfo was angry. "What do you mean by that?"

"Only that I have discovered the identity of The Butcher and removed him from circulation. Wasn't that your phrase? So I want my money. A hundred thousand cruzeiros."

Rodolfo gave a barking laugh. Then he drew the morning paper from his pocket and thrust it before Manuel. "Look at that!" he said indignantly. Large black type said: *THE BUTCHER STRIKES AGAIN . . . SOCIETY DECORATOR IS LATEST VICTIM.* "Does *this* look as though The Butcher is dead, Photographer?"

Manuel smiled. "No. It does not. Nevertheless, he is." It amused him to irritate Rodolfo.

"When did you kill him then? This morning? The decorator's mutilated body was found last night." Rodolfo spat into the dust beside his foot to express his monumental contempt for such a pitiful deception.

"The Butcher was as good as dead the moment you told me two days ago that his death was worth a hundred thousand cruzeiros to me," Manuel said. "Save for one last fling, of course." He nodded at the newspaper headline. "There is his last fling. The decorator, Floriano Fonseca."

"You are talking drivel, Photographer! What is this 'last fling' nonsense?"

"Consider," said Manuel patiently. "If I had not permitted The Butcher to butcher one last victim—*after* the police offered you the reward—you would never have got the reward. If no further murder had occurred, the police would have claimed that The Butcher had merely regained his sanity, perhaps, and ceased killing people, no thanks to The Big Ones. You see? Especially without a shred of proof that you'd ever made an effort to catch The Butcher. No, one last example of his work was needed, Rodolfo. That's why I waited for him to strike again. So that The Big Ones could get its reward. And I could get mine."

"Now it is riddles you talk in," said Rodolfo. However, he was listening very carefully to Manuel's riddles.

Manuel pulled two black-and-white photographic

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prints from an inner pocket. He offered one of them to Rodolfo. "Look," he said, "this picture I took of Floriano Fonseca after he was dead but before The Butcher mutilated him. His throat is not cut, his ring finger is not missing, you see?"

"Yes," said Rodolfo hoarsely. "And the other picture?"

"A picture I took of the victim *after* his mutilation." Manuel presented the second print. "His throat is now cut, you will notice, his ring finger hacked off." Manuel's gaze held steady on Rodolfo. "Does this constitute adequate proof that I knew who The Butcher was?"

Rodolfo tore his eyes away from the prints. "No! No! It does not! I know you too well, Photographer. To win a hundred thousand cruzeiros you would murder a dozen people, including the Devil himself, and mutilate them afterwards—as you certainly did to this poor decorator!"

Manuel nodded placidly. "I feared you might reason like that," he said. "Will this, then, perhaps convince you?" He fumbled under the table and brought forth from the camera case in his lap the severed ring finger of Floriano Fonseca, the honey-yellow topaz ring still on the blood-smeared flesh.

Rodolfo recoiled. "Is it Fonseca's finger?" he asked.

"It is. You can identify it there in my picture by the particular topaz ring."

"It still proves nothing. It is part of the same trickery as these ridiculous pictures—" Suddenly Rodolfo's eyes widened. "Unless—" he stammered. "Unless—" and he looked at Manuel as people must have once looked at Medusa.

The Photographer nodded encouragingly. "Unless what, Rodolfo?"

Rodolfo whispered, "Is that what you're trying to tell me? That *you* are The Butcher?"

"Your Big Ones almost guessed it," beamed Manuel. "The Butcher and The Photographer, they said, were two of a kind. We are not *two* of a kind, The Butcher and I. We are *one* of a kind. The same man, in fact."

Rodolfo took a gulp of his coffee and scalded his mouth. He did not notice the pain. "You are The Butcher," he said, almost as though talking to himself. He nodded vigorously. "By God, you *are!* That's what you meant just now when you said The Butcher was as good as dead the moment I offered you a hundred thousand for his life! And that's why you accepted the commission withour prior payment, a

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thing you had never done before. You knew you could earn the reward by merely ceasing your murders and mutilations?"

"Now, at last, you are beginning to see the truth. That occurred to me at once," said Manuel in a modest tone.

"And yet you murdered another man, this decorator. Why?"

"I told you why. But also to get the proof. These photographs, and this finger, this topaz ring, easily identifiable. You, yourself, said the police must have proof."

Rodolfo fell silent after one explosive word. His eyes clung to the gruesome relic before him. His thoughts were in confusion. At last he said firmly, "The pictures and Fonseca's finger convince *me*, Photographer, because I know you. They are adequate proof for The Big Ones, therefore, that you have earned your reward. My own endorsement would make that proof stick. But, alas, that is not enough. We must have proof that will convince the *police* that The Butcher is dead. Otherwise you will not get your money, nor will we get ours. This finger and these photos could still be merely a trick, the police will argue, perpetrated by the unscrupulous Big Ones to win the reward under false pretenses. Just as I thought you were attempting to deceive *us*, don't you see?"

"I see," said Manuel comfortably. "I have already thought of that possibility—that the police might accuse The Big Ones of double dealing. So I have brought you further proof which, properly used, should persuade even the police. And make them pay over the reward eagerly—yours and mine—to The Big Ones."

"Good," said Rodolfo. He glanced at Manuel out of the corners of his eyes as though reluctant to gaze directly on a madman. "What is this ultimate proof? Tell me."

Manuel nodded and brought out of his camera case underneath the table the small pretzel tin box that had belonged to Floriano Fonseca. He opened the lid with a casual gesture and offered the open tin for Rodolfo's inspection. "Do not get too close," he advised, "it smells of mortality. But it is absolute proof that you have found The Butcher."

Rodolfo, after one swift glance, withdrew as far as his chair would let him. "For God's sake!" he whispered. "What—? What—?"

"Do my trophies sicken you?" The Photographer was smiling. "To me they are

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beautiful. Yet I perceive I must give them up, if I am to earn my hundred thousand cruzeiros."

"Are these—are these the ears and fingers of The Butcher's victims?" Rodolfo inquired, recovering somewhat. "Truly the genuine mutilations?"

"Guaranteed," said Manuel. "Each can be identified by members of the victims' families, by friends, or whoever. For each, as you see, still wears its topaz earring or finger ring, described in detail to the police at the time of each murder, and in the newspapers also. These relics could only have been possessed by The Butcher. Agreed?"

"Photographer," said Rodolfo, pushing back his chair and putting his hand into the pocket where he carried his gun, "*you* nauseate me." He swallowed. "Not the relics."

"A pity," said Manuel, signaling to a distant waiter for another *cafezinho*. "Do I sicken you so much that you will fail to claim our money from the police?"

"This is still no proof that The Butcher is *dead*," Rodolfo said. "Can't you understand that?" He frowned. "The police can say we recovered these relics, as you call them, without actually destroying The Butcher. It is all well and good for you to say you will cease your murders and mutilations, but to get our money we must show the police proof that The Butcher is *dead*."

"I understand that," said Manuel. "A moment ago I said these ears and severed fingers could provide that proof 'if properly used.' You remember?"

Rodolfo nodded.

"So nothing could be simpler. Show the police a dead body. Any body. Tell them this dead man, whoever he may be, was The Butcher. And allow the police themselves to search his lodgings. They will find these two photographs of Senhor Fonseca, carefully placed in the pretzel tin with the ears and fingers of The Butcher's victims. Plant the pretzel tin, if I may suggest a refinement, in some odd place that will convince the police that The Butcher was indeed mad, a ghoul."

Manuel laughed. "Perhaps in the kitchen cupboard beside innocent tins of flour, sugar, or sweet cakes? Then, I promise you, you will have no trouble collecting our reward money. The police will be convinced. The newspapers will be convinced. Rio's citizenry will be convinced. And The Butcher will never be heard from again.

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I solemnly promise you that. Thus, the problem is resolved neatly and permanently. And I shall be a hundred thousand cruzeiros richer."

This was a long speech for The Photographer. Rodolfo listened to it in silence, occasionally nodding in agreement. When Manuel concluded he said, "A very practical suggestion, Photographer." He paused, then asked sardonically, "And where do you suggest we find a dead body to show to the police?"

Manuel smiled. "I will be glad to supply you with one," he said promptly, "at my usual rates."

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a NEW Miss Phipps minimystery by

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Everything is grist to the writer's mill—and to the detective's. Even a midnight phone call that is apparently a wrong number can arouse Miss Phipps's creative impulses . . .

MISS PHIPPS ON THE TELEPHONE

by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

The telephone rang.

Miss Phipps, dragged up from the cosy depths of her first sleep, mumbled, rolled over, and took up the phone from the table beside her bed. The time, she noted from the illuminated electric clock, was three minutes past midnight.

"Tettenham three four one eight," Miss Phipps said crossly.

"*Tettenham* three four one eight?" queried a voice.

"Yes," said Miss Phipps, noting that the voice was young, girlish, not very well educated, with a definitely northern intonation. She corrected herself and gave the new exchange, formerly known as Tettenham.

"Are you Miss Phipps?"

"Yes."

"Miss Marian Phipps?"

"Yes."

In anguish Miss Phipps ran rapidly over in her mind all her friends and relations and their present whereabouts. There was her niece with her family, there was Inspector Tarrant with his family. Which of them had had an accident? Which were near enough to London to warrant the police calling her rather than a relative? Which? Why? Where?

"Have you a brother called Randall Harvey?" continued the voice.

"No!" said Miss Phipps explosively, remembering her well-loved brother who had perished in the Normandy landing.

"No?" said the voice incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

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"Or a half brother?"

"No!"

"Perhaps your housekeeper has a brother of that name?"

"I have no housekeeper."

"Oh. Well." There was a pause in which the voice could be heard calling briskly, "Mr. Harvey! Mr. Harvey!" Then there was a pause in which nothing could be heard. Finally the voice resumed. "There's been some mistake," it said on a note of disappointment. "Good night. Sorry to have troubled you."

"Well, good night," said Miss Phipps, taken aback.

She replaced the telephone with an angry clash, and rolling over, buried her head in the pillow and tried to fall asleep again.

But she could not. It was not so much a matter of sleep interrupted as of wounded pride. Miss Phipps was a novelist and a writer of detective stories. She often began a story by imagining some mysterious situation, then thinking up circumstances which would explain it. But try as she would, she could not explain that telephone call.

It was a local call, since the girl had not begun with the 01 which nowadays precluded all London calls from a distance. The girl was northern, probably Yorkshire, so that she may have been somebody connected with Miss Phipps's niece, who lived in that county. But she seemed to think some Mr. Harvey had known Miss Phipps and claimed to be her brother.

Miss Phipps, as a woman living alone with her name in the telephone directory, was not unfamiliar with calls from young men who wanted to "Come round and have a good time," promising to be her friend if she would let them. All such callers she terrified out of their wits assuming a booming schoolmistressy Oxford-English voice, addressing them as "young man," reminding them of their mothers, and threatening to inform the police. But young men of that sort, in that kind of situation, did not employ a young girl to do their telephoning for them. Moreover—and this puzzled Miss Phipps—the girl had sounded genuinely disappointed. She seemed really sorry that Miss Phipps had no brother named Randall. Or was she sorry for some other reason?

A mistaken identity, that's all it was, Miss Phipps told herself. Randall Harvey wanted another Miss Marian Phipps, of course. He was a visitor from Yorkshire who had a friend in London who had a sister named Marian Phipps who lived in Tettenham. Miss Phipps sat up

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crossly, put on the light, and took up the telephone directory. There was no other Marian Phipps in the Tettenham section. In fact, there were no other Phippses there at all.

Miss Phipps gave a loud angry snort. From under the pillow she drew the notebook and pencil she put there every night. She found her reading glasses and put them on. Sighing, she took up her pencil and wrote down carefully the exact time of the call and every word of the conversation.

At ten o'clock the next morning, as Miss Phipps was sitting at her desk struggling with a plot which declined to grow, a ring sounded at the door of her flat. Exclaiming irritably at the interruption, she bounced to the door and flung it open.

A young man stood there. He was in his twenties, Miss Phipps judged, personable, even handsome, dark, with hair and sideburns longish, but not too long to be acceptable to Miss Phipps's old-fashioned taste. His eyes were brown and sparkling, his suit, shirt, tie, and shoes almost up to advertisement standards. Miss Phipps looked at him with interest but coldly, suspecting a salesman.

"Good morning," he said.

Miss Phipps remained markedly silent.

"I came to apologize for that stupid telephone call last night," he went on.

Miss Phipps, unable to resist an expression of genuine human feeling, thawed.

"What was it all *about*?" she asked.

"Well—" began the young man.

His pause and perplexed eyebrows skillfully suggested that the tale was too long to be told from a threshold.

"Well, come in," said Miss Phipps, still rather cross. "Sit down and tell me all. But I warn you," she added grimly, "the story had better be good."

The young man, seating himself, cleared his throat.

He's going to lie to me, reflected the experienced Miss Phipps.

"We wanted to find out if you were in. So my sister—"

"Now listen to me," said Miss Phipps kindly. "The young lady was probably not your sister, and there was no need to invent Mr. Randall Harvey in order to find out whether or not I was in."

"Well, my wife then."

"That's better. Is she really your wife, eh?"

"Yes!" shouted the young man. "What do you take me for?"

"Keep your cool," advised Miss Phipps. "Why did you

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invent Mr. Randall Harvey?"

"I didn't invent him," said the young man. "We landed in France together on D-Day."

"Now, come, young man!" Miss Phipps said with some anger. "You're far too young for that. On D-Day you would be how old? Let's say, three?"

"My father and Mr. Harvey—" began the young man.

"Your father! Well, at least your chronology is improving."

"As a matter of fact—"

"That phrase usually precedes a lie, my dear boy."

"You're too clever for me, and *that's* a fact," admitted the young man, starting to rise.

"Why not tell me the truth?" suggested Miss Phipps mildly. "I am quite curious to know why you invented a Mr. Randall Harvey."

"I didn't invent him. He's all too real. He cheated me out of a sum of money, then said his sister would pay."

"But my name is not Harvey."

"He said you were a best-selling novelist who wrote under a pseudonym."

"Ha!"

"I saw paperbacks by you on the station bookstall."

"And so?"

"He had a northern accent and I saw a picture of a mill chimney on one of your book jackets, so it seemed a good guess you were from the north."

"Better and better."

"I have heard," faltered the young man, suddenly turning scarlet, "that you could write a check for ten thousand pounds and never feel it."

"Oh, my dear boy," said Miss Phipps sadly. "Very few people can write a check for ten thousand pounds and not feel it. Those who can are usually not aging novelists. How were you proposing to make me write this check?"

"Oh, I didn't have any such grand aspirations. I just hoped—for a little help."

"Now at last you're talking some sense."

"You sounded kind on the telephone," said the lad hopefully.

"How much do you want, and why?"

"My wife and I are actors in a touring group," began the young man. "And you see—"

"Don't tell me the manager went bankrupt and there was no salary for you?"

"Why shouldn't I tell you that?" said the young man on a note of pique.

"Because it's not *with it*, my dear boy—it's out of date. That sort of thing doesn't happen nowadays. You have a trade union, Equity, you know; you can appeal to them for help."

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"Unfortunately it isn't an Equity matter. This fellow Harvey is—was—a friend of mine. He's been stealing money from people's coat pockets; somebody suspected and threatened to bring a court action if he didn't pay it all back. Of course, if he once got hauled up by the police his career would be done for—and he's quite a good actor, you know. That's the pity of it. Yes, really a very promising actor. So I lent him the money on his assurance he'd pay me back, but he didn't, and now we haven't the money to pay our hotel bill."

"Where is this hotel?"

"In Yorkshire."

"What are you doing in London, then?"

"We came last night after the show." (After the show, mused Miss Phipps, reflecting sadly on the distance from Yorkshire, the probable curtain time of the show, and the hour of the telephone call.) "To see if we could touch my wife's father. He's not a bad old boy, and the sum isn't very large. But he's away—"

"On holiday?"

"In New York on business."

"Do you know," said Miss Phipps with some solemnity, "I'm rather surprised that when you found out I was alone—for that was really the object of the Harvey ploy, wasn't it?"

"Well, y-yes."

"I thought so. I'm rather surprised," repeated Miss Phipps, "that you didn't try a spot of burglary."

"Oh, I wanted to," confessed the young man with a paradoxical air of virtue, "but Celeste was afraid you might get hurt. She's having a baby, you know."

"I'm glad Celeste has so much sense. And so you thought you'd come round this morning and try a sob story on a silly old spinster-novelist living alone."

"I don't understand you, Miss Phipps," said the young man haughtily, springing to his feet.

"By the way, what is your name?"

"Mark."

"Mark what?"

"You can't expect me to tell you that," said the young man.

"No. I don't expect so. Ah, there you are, Harrison," said Miss Phipps cheerfully, as the door opened and a large solid man in a doorman's uniform filled the gap. She now remembered with gratitude Inspector Tarrant's insistence on the installation of an emergency summoning bell from her flat to the front entrance.

"You rang, Madam."

"Yes. Just see Mr. Mark out,

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will you? *Off* the premises, please."

"Is he annoying you? Shall I ring for the police, Miss Phipps?"

"No. I don't wish to prefer charges," said Miss Phipps.

With some care Mark suppressed a sigh of relief.

"You, Mark, are a confidence trickster," Miss Phipps told him. "I don't recall what the modern phrase is—con man, is it?—but I'm sure you understand what I mean. I don't believe a single word of anything you've told me. Would a five-pound note be any use to you?"

"No!" Mark burst out in a fury.

"I thought not. Your suit is too expensive. To conclude, if there is a choice for me between tricking and being tricked, I prefer to be tricked. I prefer being the lamb to the tiger."

"You can keep it. It's a silly choice."

"Not in the long run, young man. Next time things won't go so well for you. I seriously suggest that you turn to honest work."

"What sort of honest work is open to me, do you think?" cried Mark with bitter resentment.

"Why not try writing for the magazines?" suggested Miss Phipps, handing him a copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. "You have a genuine gift for story-telling. But my dear Mark, you must get your details right. Verisimilitude matters, you know—"

"Thanks for the advice," said the young man sarcastically.

"And I also suggest that you get married."

Mark snorted and withdrew, clutching, Miss Phipps noted with satisfaction, the magazine.

"Q"

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Harry Lawn and the man sent by George Danzig never finished their chess game . . .

KING'S KNIGHT GAMBIT DECLINED

by R. L. STEVENS

Nearly every evening during the summer months Harry Lawn could be found at the little park in the town square, along with the other gray-haired elders and an occasional farm boy down from the hills. The attraction was the line of public chessboards set in stone tables along the north side of the square. It was just like in New York, someone had remarked, though perhaps the town's chess players lacked the skill and sophistication of those in Washington Square or in Central Park.

Certainly in the limited sphere of the town square Harry Lawn was considered something of a champion, ready to play all comers. During the summer of '72, when Bobby Fischer won the world's championship from Boris Spassky in Reykjavik, Iceland, and raised interest in the game to a new peak, Harry often played several games in a single evening, invariably winning with a minimum of skillful moves.

This night, a muggy Wednesday in early September, he was seated on one of the wooden spectators' benches, enjoying a particularly spirited game between two friends, when the big green limousine pulled up and parked across the square. Harry Lawn recognized Stringer at once, because it was Harry's business to know people; but he went on watching the game as if he hadn't seen Stringer. After a few moments he heard a voice at his side say, "Hello, Harry."

He turned, feigning surprise. "Well—Stringer! What brings you to my part of the state? Thinking of buying a farm?"

Stringer was a big man, twenty years younger than Harry Lawn. More than that, he was a city man out of place in small-town life. Harry enjoyed kidding him during his infrequent visits.

"You know what I'm here

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for, Harry," the big man said.

"Checkmate!" one gray-haired man shouted in triumph from the board. "I licked him, Harry! I'm ready now to take on the champ!"

Harry Lawn smiled at the compliment. "Not right now, Syd. I've got a visitor." Then, as an afterthought, he turned to Stringer. "How about it? Want to play me a game?"

Stringer stared at the chessboard in open distaste. "I haven't played in years."

"It'll come back to you."

Stringer glanced at the sky. "Getting dark."

"The park lights will go on soon. We'll be able to see the pieces. Chess has always been a big sport in our town."

"I don't know. I came on business."

"From George Danzig?"

"Of course from Danzig—you know I don't work for myself." He had dropped his voice so it would not carry to the men at the chess tables.

"You have the envelope?"

Stringer reached into his coat pocket and extracted a fat white envelope. "It's all in there—the money and the name."

Harry Lawn nodded. He opened the envelope enough to see the thick wad of one-hundred-dollar bills and the slip of white notepaper with a single name printed on it in thick black ink. The name was that of Ralph Andow, a downstate judge rumored to be under investigation for underworld ties.

"Big name these days," Harry said with a grunt.

"That's why Danzig is paying so much. We don't want any mistakes."

"I never make mistakes," Harry said. He slipped the envelope into his pants pocket. "Now how about that game?"

Seeing there was no chance of playing the champ, Syd and the others were drifting away. Harry and Stringer were almost alone in the little park, and perhaps this gave Stringer the courage to try it. "Sure, I'll play you, Harry. I might even beat you!"

The park lights went on, bathing the chess table in a soft glow that vied with the last traces of daylight. "Which color do you want?" Harry asked.

"I don't care. Black."

"Then I'll be White. I go first."

Stringer frowned. "Why's that?"

"You really haven't played in a long time. White always moves first." Harry moved his king pawn forward two squares.

"How long you been playing chess, Harry?"

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"Nearly all my life. My father and grandfather played, too." He watched Stringer move his king pawn forward two squares, and Harry followed immediately with knight to king bishop 3.

"Who's going to do the job on Andow?" Stringer asked suddenly, already beginning to lose interest in the game.

"You know I don't talk about things like that, Stringer."

"Danzig would like to know. After all, he's paying the freight."

Harry watched the big man move a knight. "I thought Danzig understood the way I worked. I'm a middleman and nothing more. I take my cut and pass the money along. Danzig never knows who did the job, and my man never knows who hired him to do the job. That way nobody gets hurt if there's a slip."

"You just said there wouldn't be a slip."

Harry Lawn sighed and ran a hand through his white hair. "I said I never make mistakes, and I don't. But there still could be a slip somewhere."

"Danzig figures he should know who the guy is, in case anything happens to you."

"I'm not that old yet, Stringer. I've got a few good years left."

"Danzig wants to know."

"So he can cut me out of the deal and save himself a grand every time?" Harry reached toward his pocket. "Hell, you can take back your money if that's the way he wants to play!"

"Calm down, Harry. The judge has got to go. He knows your man will do a nice neat job." Stringer touched one of his knights. "You and I are just knights, Harry, working for the king, doing his killing for him, just like in the Middle Ages."

"Yeah," Harry agreed, studying the board.

They played a few moves in silence, then Stringer asked, "How long will it take with Judge Andow?"

Harry Lawn shrugged. "I have to mail the money and the name to my man. That'll be a couple of days. Then he has to find Andow and set the thing up. It's got to take a week, maybe longer."

"Danzig wants it done fast. The judge is getting ready to talk to a grand jury in two weeks."

"No sweat. It'll be done by then."

"And we know you won't be talking about it."

"Have I ever?"

"This one's especially important. That's why Danzig wanted the name of your man."

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Harry captured a knight. "You tell him I can handle my affairs without any help from him. Tell him I've been down here running my little business for a hell of a lot longer than he's been bribing judges."

Stringer glanced around nervously. "Take it easy. What if someone hears you?"

"They're all in bed. The whole town's in bed by now, Stringer."

"The mosquitoes aren't—they're eating me alive! Let's quit this foolish game."

"I think I can beat you in three more moves, Stringer."

"The hell with it! Play with yourself!"

"I guess chess isn't your game."

"Damn right! One trip to see you in this one-horse town every three or four months is plenty for me."

"You could mail me the money. Then there'd be no chance of people seeing you."

"These hicks? They probably think I'm a traveling salesman." He stood up and stretched. "Besides, Danzig wanted me to talk to you this time. Make sure we all understood each other."

"We understand each other. You're not getting the name of my man."

"Well, there's something else that's bothering him."

"What's that?"

"On the last job, a couple of months ago, your man stopped long enough to take some money off the body."

"You mean the Foster hit?"

Stringer nodded. "Foster was collecting some money for Danzig when he got it, which was just bad luck. But the money was missing from the body—maybe twenty grand. Your man heisted it."

"Hell he did! My man shoots and runs."

"Not that time. There were no witnesses. He stayed long enough to take the money. Maybe he even split it with you."

"Come on, Stringer. You're making an old man lose his temper."

He took a step forward, but Stringer was faster. His beefy hand grabbed Harry by the shirt, shoving him backward onto the chessboard. Harry rolled off the stone table and fell on the grass, scattering chessmen around him.

Stringer stood above him, breathing hard. "Harry, you know I'm just doing my job. One of the king's knights."

"Is that your message?" Harry asked, getting to his feet.

Stringer stared hard at him. "I guess so, Harry. Do your job so Danzig stays happy. He's a bad guy when he's unhappy."

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"Yeah."

Stringer ground one of the chessmen into the soft earth beneath his heel. "Keep your nose clean, Harry. See you next trip." He turned and walked across the square to his car.

Harry watched him for a long time, until the big green limousine rolled away and vanished into the night. Then he walked slowly around the chess table, bending to pick up the fallen chessmen. He placed the pieces gently in their wooden box and went home.

The house where he'd lived alone since the death of his wife was just down the street from the town square. He turned on the lights and went to sit at the kitchen table. He noticed that his hands were still shaking from his encounter with Stringer.

Damn! He was getting too old for this sort of thing. Too old, when the young hoods thought he was soft enough to be bullied and threatened!

But he knew it wasn't Stringer's fault. The big man did what he was told. Obviously Danzig had decided Harry Lawn could be leaned on. Harry Lawn was just an old guy who played chess in the town square and happened to have some good guns for hire. Harry Lawn couldn't hurt anybody.

He sighed and opened the envelope, counting out the one-hundred-dollar bills. He placed ten of them to one side and slipped the rest into a fresh envelope. On its face he printed the name and address of a young man who lived in a city fifty miles away. He'd had many occasions to send the young man money, and he'd never been disappointed.

Lastly he picked up the piece of notepaper on which Ralph Andow's name was printed. He stared at it for some moments. Then, remembering the expression on Stringer's face when he'd ground the chessman into the earth, Harry crumpled the piece of paper and dropped it into the waste basket.

He drew a note pad toward him and carefully printed the name of George Danzig on the top sheet. Then he sealed it in the envelope with the money and went out to the mailbox.

As he dropped the letter into the slot he said, very softly, "Knight to king bishop six, checkmate."

"Q"

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It is often said, and perhaps generally believed, that a writer's second story is not as good as the first. Certainly it is not true in Luna Wolf's case.

Her first story, "Everybody Liked Florinda," appeared in the December 1972 issue of EQMM. Her second story, "The Kind and Considerate Murderer," is deeper, more sophisticated—altogether, in our opinion, an advance in conception and technique. It is the study of a psychotic personality—and how many new writers would even dare to challenge such a characterization?

THE KIND AND CONSIDERATE MURDERER

by LUNA WOLF

"How would you like it if we went on a cruise?"

She smiled at him gently. "If you feel like it, dear."

Of course she'd go, even though she knew he would try to kill her.

It saddened her immeasurably to realize that he was so eager to get rid of her. Her own love for him had steadily grown over the 18 years of their marriage. Yes, it was much greater now than it had been at the beginning, she thought as she gazed at him with such devotion he lowered his eyes.

It was just a fluke that none of his previous attempts had worked. Not, she sharply told an imaginary interlocutor, for want of cooperation on her part.

She had soon guessed what was happening and was resigned to it. Not merely resigned but accepting it as his wish. More than anything she wanted him to be happy. She smiled when he expressed worry about her new accident-proneness, when he seriously urged her to be extra-careful, when he even suggested psychoanalysis. To

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establish, no doubt, that there was something wrong with her mind. That, too, she accepted and dutifully went to see the analyst he chose for her.

She wanted so badly to let him know that she knew, so that their last days together would not be spoiled by lies. And she desperately wanted to ask him why.

Yes, why? Hadn't she always been an admiring, devoted, compliant wife? Had she ever by word or deed indicated dissatisfaction? If on occasion she had vaguely regretted the need to give up her career for his sake, these moments of regret had been brief. She'd felt deeply that it had been well worth the sacrifice. And she had made quite a satisfactory life for herself, reading a lot, occasionally writing some poetry—not very good, she knew, but rather satisfying—painting a little, working in her garden. Yes, she knew how to keep busy.

So why did he want to kill her? Could her depression and poor health of the past year have annoyed him to that degree? She tried so hard not to be a burden, to behave as normally as possible. Or had he fallen in love with someone else? She couldn't believe it, but if so, wouldn't the usual thing have been for him to ask for a divorce? But of course he knew that she could never live without him.

She tried to explain some of her feelings to the analyst, a tall dry man whom she found intimidating.

"He's such a wonderful person. Intelligent, sensitive, considerate, passionate and tender—everything a woman can want."

"Then you consider your marriage a happy one?"

"Oh, yes, marvelously happy. True, we've never had any children but that doesn't matter. My husband fills my life completely."

"And yet you have been suffering from depression for a year. We must find the cause of that."

"My poor health is the cause."

"What's been wrong?"

"Nothing very much, just bad headaches, indigestion, and terrible, terrible fatigue, so that sometimes I can hardly drag myself around."

"But your physician found nothing organically wrong?"

"No, he said it was—well, he said it was nerves."

"So seemingly it is not your physical state that causes the depression but rather the other way around."

"I have no reason to be depressed. I told you how

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happy I am! Why, the longer I know my husband the more I love and appreciate him. I don't even need other people, don't like parties or anything like that."

"Do you have any close friends?"

"Well, of course I know some people but they're not exactly intimate friends. I told you that all I really want is to be with my husband. And he doesn't at all mind not having a social life—he sees so many people at the college."

"He teaches at Blakeham, doesn't he?"

"That's right. He's chairman of the English department and loves his work."

"Are there any tensions or resentments on his part that you know of?"

"Towards me? No. Definitely not. Very early in our marriage he was a little self-conscious because he is smaller than I am, but that's long since gone."

She had never intended to tell the doctor about her husband's attempts on her life but one day he forced it out of her.

"You seriously believe your husband is trying to kill you? Why?"

"I don't know. That's the only thing that bothers me. Why."

"The *only* thing? Surely you're bothered by his desire to kill you, or at least your belief in it?"

"I've always lived to make him happy; I don't mind dying if that will make him happy."

"I see . . . Now, what makes you so sure he has tried to kill you?"

"I can't help being sure. The evidence is overwhelming."

And she went on to tell him about the time he tried to push her down the cellar stairs, pretending to steady her when she stumbled.

"But maybe he did try to steady you."

"I felt him push. It was just chance that I managed to grab a wall hook."

Then there was the incident of the mushrooms. He was a fine amateur mycologist and they'd been eating the mushrooms he had picked for years. That last time, maybe three or four weeks ago, she hadn't been feeling well and he'd especially gone out to get her some, to cheer her up.

"I usually love them in a nice cream sauce on toast, but this time I simply couldn't swallow. To please him I ate a little, all I could force down. That night I was horribly sick. If I'd eaten more I'd be dead."

"Did your husband eat any of the mushrooms?"

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"A mouthful that I saw. He claims he finished what I left."

"Did he get ill?"

"No, of course not. He knew what to avoid."

"All mushrooms look alike cooked in a cream sauce."

"Well, he managed it somehow since I got sick and he didn't."

The third happening was in a way the most frightening.

"You see, I suffer from claustrophobia and he knows it. He's such a very kind person that I can't understand his doing this. I was standing just inside the linen closet in sort of a mezzanine alcove we have when I heard him call out that he was leaving for work. I leaned around the closet door. He was halfway up the eight steps and we said goodbye. I heard the front door slam shut—he's always slamming doors, the only ungentle thing he does—and then a few seconds later the closet door slammed shut on me. It was terrifying. I would have suffocated if it hadn't been the cleaning woman's day to come in."

And she shuddered violently.

If she could not convince the doctor that these were genuine attempts to kill her, neither could he persuade her that she was wrong. Not that she cared what the man thought. She hadn't wanted to tell him about the incidents; actually she didn't want to see him at all and only did it to please her husband.

So when she told the analyst about the proposed cruise and he smugly pointed out how concerned her husband was about her welfare, she just shrugged. What did it matter? It gave her great satisfaction to think that the fool doctor would soon know he'd been mistaken, that she would have the last laugh.

As the days passed she began looking forward more and more to the cruise. To get away from the snow and the cold! To die in the sun, that was really all she asked for. She loved the sun—she had never really been comfortable in the severe New England winters.

"My Mediterranean blood," she often joked, referring to her southern French ancestry.

She went about humming, happily taking their summer things out of storage, airing, washing, ironing them under her husband's pleased gaze.

"That's what you've been needing all this time, sweetheart," he once said, hugging her, "a bit of nice warm sunshine."

"Ah, sunshine, sunshine," she'd crooned, leaning against him.

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How nice it was of him, she reflected, to think of killing her in warmth. Once in a while she wondered how he'd do it but the answer was obvious and she shied away from it. She'd always been afraid of water and couldn't swim. He knew that, of course, and she was convinced that he was too kind simply to let her drown. No doubt he'd see to it that she was unconscious at the time.

And finally it was the day of their departure. She stood looking for the last time at her lovely home, at the expanse of lawn surrounding it, and nostalgically thought she'd never see the garden bloom again. This time she almost turned to her husband to ask him why. But what difference did it really make?

The ship looked festive, all white and flagged in the sun, and she felt irrepressibly gay as they stepped on board. It was good that their last days together would pass joyfully. She hoped he'd let her have a few days of basking on the deck and, knowing him so well, she was confident he would. Perhaps he'd even wait until the return voyage.

Life on board was just as she'd envisioned it. Though she didn't mingle much with her fellow passengers, their holiday spirit wafted over her like a delicious scent. The weather was superb and she sat in a deck chair all day long, just lying there in a semidoze.

Her husband would occasionally come to sit by her side, taking her hand and stroking it, not even urging her to join him in the various shipboard games. Happy as they'd been before, they now achieved truly perfect happiness—not the excited bliss of their early days together but a profoundly tranquil and honeysweet felicity. This was surely the pinnacle of their marriage.

But for all this she never doubted for a moment that he would go through with his plan. She was more grateful to him than ever for delaying its execution, but as they started on their way back she grew just a little restive. He was cutting it awfully fine, and something might happen at any moment to spoil the perfection of the cruise.

Three days before the end of the voyage she finally knew the time had come. He'd been particularly tender and attentive all day and she knew he would kill her that night. In a sudden great surge of affection she decided that she'd help him all she could. It would be terrible for him to endure another failure. In any case, she could wait no longer.

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That evening after supper they strolled arm in arm on deck. But it was too early; there were still too many people around. It would happen later, after he had his evening game of chess. As they had every night since they'd embarked, they would meet in the lounge at 10:30 for a nightcap, then take a final walk before going to bed. Except that tonight she wouldn't be going to bed.

As she sat in her usual deck chair in the silvery night, barely aware of the dance band in the lounge, she reflected that he'd probably drop some sleeping pills into her drink. But that wouldn't give them enough time to work, she suddenly realized with a surge of terror. Digging into her purse she took out her own supply of capsules and quickly swallowed six. That was much better. She'd hate to be plunged into that black water fully conscious.

Soon she was totally relaxed and slightly drowsy. She mustn't on any account fall asleep before it was time to go down. The sudden loud rhythm of the band jarred her out of reverie. It might be better to walk around a little, to clear her head just a little.

Unsteadily rising from the chair she made her way to the railing and looked down into turbulent phosphorescence. Not very inviting, she shuddered. Where would he do it? She was quite heavy to push over the side and he, poor darling, wasn't very big. He must have picked a spot where the railing was lower, probably on the upper deck, where the lifeboats were. She turned toward the stairs and pulled herself up, then zigzagged to the place she had in mind.

She was getting terribly sleepy. What a shame he wasn't here now. She didn't think she'd be able to keep awake much longer. Then, with sudden striking clarity, she realized there was no need to wait. Helping him was not enough! She'd do the job for him! Gratefully closing her eyes she leaned over farther and farther.

Footsteps sounded in her straggling mind, just behind her. So he'd come. She tried to twist back, but her unsteady feet slipped and she lost what balance she had.

As she went over she felt more than saw his arm reach out toward her.

"Q"

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"This is my chance to hide the ravages of time . . .

BEFORE THE DELUGE

by EDWARD WELLEN

THE BEREAVED: Kind of Louis to take me for an airing in his carriage; he's shown surprising sympathy. Yet I have the feeling his sorrow's more for my grief than for the loss itself, though he often caressed the child and deluged her with presents. Still, I do wish he would not harp on the subject. But then, he's always loved to speak of death, seize upon everything recalling the idea of death, in spite of his strongest fears of it. The night he had indigestion and thought he was dying! How grateful he was to me and my attendant and the doctor she fetched, and how secret he wished it kept! Must he go on about my daughter's illness and death? I know my loss, she was beautiful as an angel, she was destined to the highest fortunes, she was the hope of my waning years when I shall no longer be able to trade on my own charms. Are we stopping? Good, while he's peering out—where's my rouge?—this is my chance to hide the ravages of time.

THE COMFORTER: I had always thought her a *macreuse*, a cold-blooded thing; the depth of her grief astonishes me. My spies in the post office inform me that people are writing one another that her daughter was poisoned. No need for alarm; *canaille* always spread canards when someone of note dies unexpectedly. The child *was* a dainty dish, truly *un morceau de roi.* But it would have proved awkward had the mother learned of it. How could I be sure the child, in spite of her promises, would remain silent? Ga, to think that a pinch of powder can snuff out a life! I could not very well toss her into the madhouse, where I shut that other little girl, the one who believed I was a Polish nobleman only and then found letters in my pocket revealing me to be Louis XV. What time is it? This airing has done me good; I have a great appetite. Black becomes Pompadour. Why do we stop? A frown, and my coachman will run that peasant and his manure cart—what do the rabble call it, tumbril?—into the ditch.

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a NEW crime story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"Why didn't somebody outside the supermarket see what was happening and call the police?"

The story of as strange a holdup as you've ever read about . . .

A BAD SCENE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Recently I was witness to a most unusual crime and I'm writing the story down for you to believe or not, as you wish. You'll soon understand why I say that, because here is a case where the victims know who robbed them—yet no charges will ever be pressed.

Perhaps I'd better go ahead and tell it as simply as I can.

I was helping my wife out by picking up a few last-minute items at the neighborhood supermarket. She was at home preparing Steaks Esterhazy pending the arrival of special guests that evening. My shopping trip was a double help to her since it got me out of the house where my presence would only add to the tension of the intricate slicing and simmering.

The big food store was moderately busy, the way I like it to be. Saturday crowds, of course, are impossible. But equally depressing to me is a Monday morning supermarket with empty aisles haunted by the ghostly recorded violins playing one of a thousand indistinguishable melodies. It may be that the abundance of untouched food stirs in my subconscious a buried awareness of the hungry one-third of the world's population. Anyway.

On this midweek afternoon the store was just busy enough. So I trundled that cart I've always managed to find in every market I've ever shopped in—the one with the half-broken wheel—and soon had picked out the butternut

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squash, the bouillon cubes, the green onions, and the tin of imported shortbread, and there I was, fourth in line at the express checkout counter.

There were three other cashiers working and perhaps a total of 20 carts waiting to be punched out and another 40 shoppers plying the aisles. There was that summertime smell in the huge market made up of air conditioning, ripe fruit, baked goods, and a bit of the pungency of dusty gravel that had made its way in from the parking lot.

I was leaning on my cart, nicely sedated by supermarket hypnosis, when the young men with guns ran in.

There were six of them and they lined up across the front window. They were dressed in jeans and T-shirts and had made no attempt to disguise themselves: open suntanned faces, long hair, a couple of beards. I could not have put a name to any of them but I certainly recognized at least two from the neighborhood.

Before I had time to become nervous, the music stopped in mid phrase. I looked up at the glass-enclosed office and saw two armed young men inside. One was keeping the manager and his assistant away from the telephone while the other was holding an intercom microphone. His nervous voice burst out of the speakers.

"Nobody is going to get hurt if everybody cooperates. Just leave your shopping carts and move to the front of the store. Pass the cashiers and stand near the front windows."

As I pushed past the cash register and joined the rest of the crowd in the open area near the roller belt that carried boxed orders to the delivery bay, I felt a twinge of reckless anger. I was carrying more money than I should have been and I was about to lose it.

Why didn't somebody outside the supermarket see what was happening and call the police? I stared out the window and soon saw the reason why the holdup would go on uninterrupted. Barriers had been placed at the entrance to and the exit of the parking lot, and a movie camera on a tripod was being adjusted by another teen-ager in jeans and a surplus Army jacket. A couple of his aides were herding spectators beyond the barriers. The people outside were calm, mildly interested. Of course. Some kind of movie film was being shot involving a make-believe supermarket robbery.

When all 60 or so of us were standing quietly, the ringleader came down from the office and confronted us. He was tall,

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blond, and clean-shaven, and in the bright sunlight his blue eyes seemed to disappear.

The crowd was under control except for one middle-aged lady who decided now was the time to start crying. The tall young man stepped close to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Why are you crying?" He smiled at her. "Has anybody hurt you?"

She put a handkerchief to her mouth and watched him as he walked back to the front of the crowd and climbed onto a checkout counter. Perhaps I may forget this episode in a few years, but the handsome young man will be part of that woman's memories forever.

"All right," he said, sounding decidedly less nervous now. "You aren't going to lose your money. You aren't going to lose your watches or jewelry or credit cards. I just want you to walk by me one at a time. Don't be afraid."

The guards with the guns began prodding us forward and at the same time one of them produced a large wicker basket which he set at his leader's feet.

The first customer was a gray-haired lady with a large purse and who, like most of us, carried a raincoat because there had been showers on and off all day. The young man took the raincoat from her and reached into its pockets. He took out an object which proved to be a tin of smoked oysters and dropped it into the basket. From the other pocket he extracted a folded plastic bag. It contained a pair of bargain pantyhose with the supermarket price sticker still on it. He dropped them into the basket, too.

I glanced at the store manager. His face was red, and as I looked at him he put one hand over his mouth and turned away.

The gentleman accompanying the gray-haired lady was wearing his raincoat. The blond leader reached into one pocket and took out two packs of transistor-radio batteries. The man began to say something in a mumbling voice but one of the young men with a gun took a step toward him and he closed his mouth. From the other pocket the ringleader hauled out a package containing a safety razor and a dispenser of blades. Both articles went into the basket.

"When I finish with you folks, kindly move through this aisle back into the store. You'll all leave together when we're done."

Of the 60-odd customers who were frisked, only eight were not carrying concealed shoplifted items. From the rest

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the young man uncovered a wide range of merchandise: packages of soup mix, ballpoint pens, a bottle of olives, a wooden pepper mill, jars of shrimp cocktail, small tins of caviar. The parade filed sheepishly by, surrendering almost everything small enough to be stuffed into a pocket or purse.

When the last customer had been searched, two young men picked up the basket and with the others left the store. Outside they were joined by their friends who loaded the camera and barriers into a station wagon while the rest got into a couple of jalopies and were off. It was that simple.

Inside, everybody was strangely silent. About all the store lost in the bizarre holdup was the trade of the exposed shoplifters who, almost to a man and woman, abandoned their grocery orders and departed.

As for the loot, it can't have amounted to even $100. The total of all that individual petty thievery, combined in one haul, was still petty.

Why then did the young men do it? Was it to show us, respectable members of the so-called Establishment, that we who so often criticize bearded, unmotivated youth have nothing much in the way of an example to offer?

In any case it was a bad scene and one in which I would just as gladly not have taken part. I have not said whether I was one of the majority who were caught in the act of perpetrating their daily crimes; nor do I intend to say.

The point is: what were a lot of law-abiding citizens robbed of that day? Petty loot? No. What they were really robbed of was their self-respect. And it appears they had little enough of that to begin with.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Though we have entered that sluggish season, pre-fall, when by tradition publishers hesitate to sponsor worthy sensationalism, your mentor can find no cause for complaint. Heartily I welcome any whirl of the merry-go-round which provides two lively detective novels, one superior mystery-adventure, and one Victorian saga exploring murky byways during the reign of the Good Queen. Enough for prelude; let's go.

Wit and sophistication, animating colorful or eccentric personalities in a picturesque Connecticut town, mark *A Dying Fall*, by Hildegarde Dolson (Lippincott, $5.95), as one of the best mysteries this year.

During the lifetime of her domineering tycoon father, handsome Grace Dilworth has reached mature years without learning much about men or their ways. Inheriting millions on her father's death, Grace returns home from a long cruise with Davin Lowry, the impressive, theatrically handsome stranger she has determined to marry.

About Davin Lowry people can't make up their minds. Fortune-hunter or honest man, real or phony, loving Grace or with other plans? Then besotted Grace and her bridegroom-to-be announce their intention of destroying the town's cherished rose garden by turning it into a display ground for avant-garde statuary. Soon afterwards Lowry pitches down the steps into the rose garden, there to be found dead and impaled on a horrendous exhibit.

Retired Inspector McDougal and Lucy Ramsdale, that likable if cat-curious widow, investigate throughout tension by day and terror at night until a very vicious killer is snatched out from behind the screen of roses in this ingenious, polished performance by another candidate for high honors in the Ladies' Baffle Brigade.

From the first chapter of *Naked to the Grave*, by Harry Carmichael (Saturday Review Press, $5.95), when Julian Davey's lovely, faithless wife is slain and mutilated with a pair of scissors in the bedroom of the Hampstead flat, suspicion points straight at

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Julian Davey himself. It's another problem for the investigating team of Piper, insurance assessor, and Quinn, ultra-imaginative newspaperman, in a whirligig of easy morals and easy money.

Hired to unearth evidence of Davey's innocence, Piper seems only to find evidence of Davey's guilt. But doors open into other motives, other lives; and what *did* the old woman see? Though it may not be the author's best story, Mr. Carmichael writes with such persuasiveness that he lures you into his grip and won't let go; you can't stop reading until you learn the truth.

From the dark shadows of *Postscript to a Dead Letter*, by Donald MacKenzie (Houghton Mifflin, $5.95), France's *Union Corse*, the criminal brotherhood like one on our own shores, stretches tentacles across Paris to crush and destroy.

Radnor Brown, hapless young American, has stumbled on evidence of the brotherhood's traffic in heroin; it lands him only in jail on a false charge. Breaking out to join Phoebe, his attractive sister, young Brown finds a swashbuckling champion in Ross Macintyre, Canadian reporter for the London *Post*.

Aided by George Gunn, an old pal; by Ilinka Ostravo, that surprising lady from Russia; and by Misty Farrell, the reporter's own Girl Friday, Ross Macintyre sets out to prove his belief through adventures loaded with high explosive at every step.

Our Canadian Scot won't be beaten. Past booby-traps set by cops, robbers, robber cops, and robbers in government, Macintyre batters his way to the confrontation at, of all places, a convent with a very strange Reverend Mother. And Donald Mackenzie, himself a Canadian Scot, has added another brilliant mystery-adventure to his already impressive list.

In a stuffily curtained mansion of London, 1890, Jean Stubbs's monumental *Dear Laura* (Stein and Day, $6.95) erupts with bitter domestic clashes leading to death by poison. Though there seem to be familiar elements—Laura, the beautiful young wife; Theodore, the cold and too-reserved husband; Titus, the dashing younger brother—yet no event here follows any familiar pattern; we may expect only the unexpected.

When investigation proves Theodore's death to have been suicide and not murder, can any author sustain a fever of interest for almost three hundred pages? And yet Miss Stubbs does just that. Surprise piles on surprise until, with one last twist of the knife, we are left with a cumulation which must be called satisfactory because it is so obviously inevitable.

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a *NEW* Pierre Chambrun story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Here is the newest story about Pierre Chambrun, resident manager of the Beaumont, the top luxury hotel in New York—a city inside a city, with its own shops, restaurants, night clubs, and police force. Almost anything can happen at the Beaumont—including almost any kind of crime . . .

Have we ever mentioned that Hugh Pentecost writes about young boys with a special understanding? He does—his teen-age boys ring true . . .

In this issue we give you not one but two stories by Hugh Pentecost—a slice of Chambrun and a slice of Jericho, with a filling of the first parody-pastiche of Pierre Chambrun (Henri Champoux) and John Jericho (Job Joshua), in the story of their first confrontation as rival detectives.

Don't miss this sleuthian sandwich . . .

CHAMBRUN PLAYS IT COOL

by HUGH PENTECOST

He was an attractive kid, a little more formal and polite than most fourteen-year-olds of my acquaintance. I watched him come down the ramp from the cabin of the jetliner at Kennedy Airport. Not many kids of his age fly the Atlantic alone, certainly not with this boy's air of complete sophistication.

But when I thought it over it wasn't so odd. His maternal grandfather, Alistair McRae, the British shipping tycoon, owned private planes, private yachts, private God-knows-what-else. Travel surely was nothing new to young Robert Fairburn, although I understood this was his first trip to New York and to the United States.

He was not very tall, was quite slim, and was wearing gray flannels, a blue blazer, and a matching blue schoolboy's

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cap. Gold-rimmed glasses gave him an owlish look. He carried a raincoat and a pigskin attaché case. We'd be picking up his luggage after customs.

I stopped him at the gate. "Bobby Fairburn?" I said.

He gave me a puzzled look. "Yes, sir."

"My name is Mark Haskell," I told him. "I'm meeting you because your father couldn't make it."

"Oh," he said, in a faraway voice. His eyes narrowed behind the glasses as if he felt sudden pain.

"There's nothing wrong," I said. "Nothing important, I mean. Your father was held up on the West Coast and he won't get in till later tonight. I work at the Beaumont Hotel where you and he will be staying. We'll try to keep you entertained until your father gets here."

"Thank you, sir," he said, looking up at me, his eyes steady. "My father hasn't—?"

"He's fine," I said. "No problem."

He took it for granted I knew his story. I did. His mother was Jennifer McRae, daughter of one of the three richest men in the world, a target, fifteen years ago, for every international fortune hunter on both sides of the Atlantic. One of them had won her—Lance Fairburn, a young man of great charm, an enthusiastic polo player, a top golfer, with no discernible means of making a living. Fairburn had persuaded Jennifer to elope with him.

Old man McRae shook the earth trying to break up the marriage but Jennifer stood by her guns. Lance was the man she loved. Why should he have to make a living? Making her happy was enough. Young Bobby was born a year later.

By then the major flaw in Lance Fairburn's makeup was beginning to show. He was a faithful husband, a loving father—and a hopeless alcoholic. According to Pierre Chambrun, my boss and the resident manager of the Beaumont who had known the McRaes for years, Lance Fairburn tried hard, but he simply couldn't lick his drinking problem. After a couple of years Jennifer shut herself and her small son away from Fairburn. Old man McRae closed his pocketbook tight and Lance Fairburn was on his own and broke.

Fairburn, Chambrun had told me, tried his best. He went to some expensive place to take the "cure." Where he got the money for it no one knew, but Chambrun believed Jennifer gave it to him without her father's knowledge. She really loved the guy.

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Fairburn came out of a long battle, apparently "clean." He went for a whole year without touching a drop and Jennifer, over her father's protests, took him back. Things went well for a while but gradually Fairburn began to slip—a drink here, two drinks there. Alcoholics can't do that.

One night he and Jennifer were at a party at someone's house in the British countryside. Fairburn got himself bombed, insisted on driving home, ran into a tree, demolished the car and was thrown free and unharmed himself; but he left his lovely wife paralyzed from the waist down for life. Young Bobby was four years old when that tragedy struck. Only careful surveillance by friends kept Alistair McRae from murdering his son-in-law.

During the next ten years Jennifer and Bobby lived at her father's country estate in Huntingdonshire. Fairburn came to America, wound up on Skid Row, then somehow pulled himself together, sold second-hand cars and second-class products of all sorts, sometimes as a door-to-door salesman. Slowly, torturously from all accounts, he finally licked the drinking problem. He was now selling real estate in California.

A woman who truly loves is a kind of miracle. Bound to a wheel chair, her life destroyed except for Bobby, Jennifer still recognized the things in Fairburn that had attracted her in the first place. She also recognized the need for a father in Bobby's life. Divorced women or widows usually find a new man who can take that place with a child. Jennifer didn't have that option.

But she had ways of getting news about Lance Fairburn and she was finally convinced that, at last, he was clean. It was impossible for Fairburn to come to England to see his son. Old man McRae had never forgiven and would never forget.

So it was arranged for Bobby to come to New York to visit his father. Chambrun, an old friend, was part of the scheme. The boy and his father would have a suite at the Beaumont, paid for by Jennifer. Without ostentation Chambrun would be there to see to it that Fairburn didn't fall off the wagon and make a shambles of his son's visit.

On the way in from the airport in the hotel's limousine Bobby didn't seem to be much interested in the great new city he'd never seen before.

"May I ask what you do at the hotel, sir?" he asked me.

"Public relations," I said. "Publicity, handshaking, overseeing big parties, conventions,

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fashion shows, what-have-you. I am the perpetual smiler. Your friend, Mr. Chambrun, does the growling."

"I've never met Mr. Chambrun," Bobby said. "Mother says he's nice."

"You'll like him," I said.

We drove on for a way in silence.

"Do you know my father, sir?" Bobby asked.

"I've never met him," I said, "but I saw him play in a polo match some years ago. He was hell on wheels."

"The thing that's really great about him," the boy said gravely, "is that he's beaten his problem."

That, I thought, was an extraordinarily adult comment from a fourteen-year-old. Some kind of a kid, this owlish boy. Some kind of a mother who had indoctrinated him so well.

Pierre Chambrun is a short square man with bright black eyes buried in deep pouches—eyes that can twinkle with humor or compassion, or when he is angry, turn hard and cold as a hanging judge's. He presides over a private world of his own, the Hotel Beaumont, one of the top luxury hotels in the world. It is like a small city within one building, with its own shops, restaurants, night clubs, cooperatively owned homes, its own hospital, safety-deposit vaults, beauty parlors, ballrooms, bars, even its own police force. And Chambrun is the boss, the king, a man with the uncanny ability to know exactly what is going on everywhere in his domain at all times. Or almost always. When he doesn't it's time for all of us who work for him to take to the bomb shelters.

Chambrun was at his best in the few moments he spent with Bobby Fairburn when I delivered the boy. He had a gift for talking to children on their level without sounding patronizing.

"My mother speaks very warmly of you, sir," the boy said.

"She was just about your age when I first met her," Chambrun said. "She's one of my favorite people. How is she?"

The boy's face took on that pained look I'd seen when he was worried about his father. "It's terribly hard for her," he said. "The wheel chair and all. She's pretty wonderful."

"Please give her my love when you talk to her," Chambrun said. "Which you can do any time you want, you know, by just picking up the phone in your rooms."

"I—I'm not sure I understand why my father isn't here," Bobby said.

"He missed plane connections on the West Coast,"

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Chambrun explained. "He should get here about nine o'clock this evening. You've got about four hours to wait. Would you like to have someone show you the city? Would you like company for dinner here in the hotel?"

"I think I'd like to wait to see the city with my father," Bobby said "Could I—could I have dinner in my room?"

"Of course."

"And is there a color television set? I've seen very little American television."

Chambrun smiled. "Maybe you should leave well enough alone," he said dryly.

I took the boy to his suite and left him there, after showing him how to tune in the color TV. Jennifer Fairburn had reserved one of the most expensive suites in the Beaumont for the boy and her unhappy husband.

I had a million things to do and didn't think much more about young Fairburn. I remember I was having a drink with a fashion designer in the Trapeze Bar, discussing an upcoming show to be held in the Grand Ballroom when I happened to glance at my watch and saw that it was a little after nine. I remember thinking the boy and his father must be reunited by now.

It was about 9:45 when I was called to the phone in the Trapeze. It was Chambrun.

"Lance Fairburn is here," Chambrun said, "but the boy doesn't seem to be in his suite. Do you know where he is, Mark?"

"Haven't the foggiest," I said.

"Well, locate him," Chambrun said, and the phone clicked off.

A quick series of inquiries produced no results. The night bell captain hadn't seen him. Jerry Dodd, our security chief, had no word on him—they hadn't been on the lookout for the boy. I checked with Room Service and learned that Bobby had ordered dinner about 6:30.

I went up to the suite and let myself in with a passkey. The dinner table was set up. Bobby had ordered a shell steak, a mixed green salad, rolls and butter, ice cream, and a glass of milk. He'd hardly touched the dinner—the ice cream was almost melted. I had the notion he'd left just after he had started to eat. The television set was on, tuned to some war film. I switched it off and headed for Chambrun's office.

Lance Fairburn was a tall, wiry, dark man, with lines of dissipation at the corners of his mouth and eyes. He must have

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been extraordinarily handsome when he was a young man. He looked at me with brown eyes that were like a stricken animal's.

"I guess he decided to run out on me," Fairburn said, when I'd reported. "I'd hoped it would work, but—"

Chambrun was at his desk, smoking one of his Egyptian cigarettes, his eyes narrowed. "I'd have sworn he was looking forward eagerly to seeing you," he said.

Fairburn glanced at the sideboard which was well stocked with liquor. I thought how close the alcoholic always is to the brink of disaster. A light flashed on one of Chambrun's telephones.

"They've probably found him," Chambrun said. He switched the button on the squawk box so that we could all hear the call. It was Mrs. Kiley, the hotel's night switchboard chief.

"An overseas call for you, Mr. Chambrun."

"Put it through," Chambrun said. He glanced at Fairburn. "The boy probably called his mother."

"Overseas Operator Number Eight," a woman's voice said. "Mr. Chambrun?"

"Speaking."

"One moment, please."

Then a man's voice, loud and angry. "Chambrun? Alistair McRae here. You know what's happened to Bobby?"

"Happened to him?"

"He's been kidnaped!" McRae shouted. "They demand a million in ransom money. Has Fairburn showed up?"

"He's here in my office," Chambrun said. "He can hear what you're saying."

The angry voice rose. "So help me, Fairburn, I'll kill you for this. That's a promise."

Fairburn stared at the squawk box, his face the color of ashes.

"Chambrun?"

"I'm here," Chambrun said. His voice had a flat metallic sound.

"My instructions are to have the money delivered to you as soon as the banks are open in the morning," McRae said. "They will then contact you directly and instruct you how to pay it."

"The police—the F.B.I.?" Chambrun asked.

"No! I won't run any risks." The voice shook. "Listen to me, Fairburn. I should have known you'd take this opportunity to feather your nest. When you return Bobby I'll have you hunted down wherever you're hiding."

"I swear to God I don't know what this is all about," Fairburn said.

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"You'll get the money, but don't count on spending it," McRae said. "Chambrun?"

"Yes."

"Jennifer doesn't know yet what's happened to her boy. Don't call her. It would be too much for her to take. When Bobby is safe, then she can know. And Chambrun?"

"Yes?"

"For God's sake play it cool. Do whatever they ask."

"Count on it," Chambrun said.

The phone clicked off. The room was so silent it hurt. Fairburn moistened his lips as if he meant to speak, but Chambrun's cold black eyes seemed to pin him to silence. I tried to imagine how it had all come about—the endless fight against his alcoholism, the hopeless attempt to get solidly on his feet, the constant hostility from old McRae when what Fairburn needed was help.

This situation in which he was supposed to make a new contact with his son had provided him with an opportunity to get himself financially secure and, at the same time, revenge himself on McRae. He must have felt that nothing he could work out with Bobby would really be important. McRae would break it down in the long run. This way the boy wouldn't be harmed and Fairburn would have a million bucks—if he could escape the life-long manhunt that McRae would set in motion. It was the desperate act of a desperate man.

"He's mad!" Fairburn whispered. "I wouldn't hurt Bobby. My God, more than anything else I hoped I could get to be a father again."

"How did you happen to miss your plane connection on the coast?" Chambrun asked.

"I didn't miss it," Fairburn said. "I was bumped off the flight."

"Bumped?"

"Some VIP. State Department, they hinted. I begged them to take someone else off the flight because I had a young son waiting for me at this end. Why did they have to choose me? They were very polite, but no dice. I had to wait until the next flight."

"It can be checked," Chambrun said.

"Of course."

"I suggest you came on an earlier flight, got to the boy shortly before seven, persuaded him to go somewhere with you, then showed up at nine and reported him missing."

"No! You can check out the flight I came on."

"I will," Chambrun said. He glanced at his wrist watch. "We have nearly twelve hours to wait before the money can be

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delivered by the bank and I get instructions. Do you guarantee the boy will be safe?"

"For God's sake listen to me!" Fairburn said, his voice ragged. "I swear to you I know nothing about this. I wanted this reconciliation to work. I—I love Jennifer. I dream that somehow, sometime, we can get together again. I owe her my life, God knows. The last thing in the world that would make any sense would be for me to try to gouge McRae. He's a killer, and he would never give up, just as he says. What I've told you is true. I was bumped off the plane. When I got here Bobby was gone. You've got to believe me!"

"It's not a bad gamble," Chambrun said, his voice cold. "I'd say you have a fifty-fifty chance of getting away with the money and escaping from McRae. You've had time to plan it in detail."

"Oh, God!" Fairburn said, and covered his face with his hands.

"Is somebody with the boy?" Chambrun asked. "Or do you have to get back to him?"

Fairburn just turned his head from side to side without answering.

"You are at liberty to stay in the suite that was reserved for you," Chambrun said. "By the way, what was the airline that bumped you off its plane?"

"Northern International," Fairburn said.

Chambrun put out his cigarette in the mother-of-pearl ashtray on his desk. "So now we have nothing to do but wait for instructions from the kidnapers. I suggest you report here at nine sharp in the morning, Fairburn. The money should be arriving from the bank shortly after that."

The minute Fairburn had walked unsteadily out of the office, Chambrun turned active. He picked up the phone and instructed Mrs. Kiley, the night supervisor on the switchboard, to monitor all incoming and outgoing calls to and from Suite 9D. Then he turned to me.

"Call Northern International and try to get a confirmation of Fairburn's story."

Then he asked Mrs. Kiley to locate Jerry Dodd, our head security officer, and have him come to the office at once.

I went down to our travel office to do my phoning. It took me about half an hour to come up with a report. Northern International had no record of anyone having been bumped off a plane in Los Angeles. Their passenger lists showed that a Lance Fairburn had presumably been on a plane that would have landed him in New York in time to meet

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Bobby's plane at Kennedy. So much for Fairburn's story.

I went to report to Chambrun and found Jerry Dodd with him. Jerry is a slim, dark, hard little man with the brightest eyes you've ever seen. He is a first-class man and one of the two or three people on the hotel staff that Chambrun found indispensable. I delivered my information along with a Northern International flight schedule, and neither Chambrun nor Jerry seemed surprised.

"It's not hard to figure what the next move will be," Jerry said. "The money will be here a few minutes after nine in the morning. You'll be told that Fairburn has been designated to hand it over to the kidnapers."

"I give it to him and he walks away with a million dollars," Chambrun said.

"It sounds like a remarkably easy way to get rich quick," I said. "Bobby would go anywhere with him, wait anywhere for him. He doesn't have to hold the boy, in the usual sense. In the morning he collects the dough, and when Bobby gets tired of waiting for him he comes back here for help."

"Like rolling off a log," Jerry said. "The kid, without realizing it, is a willing ally. I wonder what kind of story Fairburn gave him to persuade him they shouldn't be staying here at the Beaumont?"

Chambrun's eyes were narrowed against the smoke from his cigarette. He didn't seem to have heard either of us.

I made my nightly rounds of the hotel, checking on the way with all the staff members as to whether or not they'd seen Bobby leaving the hotel with anyone. No one had.

I went to bed about two o'clock. Shortly after eight I was shaved, showered, and dressed, had taken two bites of breakfast, and reported to Chambrun's office. Chambrun and Jerry were both there ahead of me. I thought Chambrun looked tired, as if he'd had very little sleep. It seemed Alistair McRae's secretary had called him several times during the night to find out if there was any news.

"A half year of my salary in phone calls," Jerry said. "The old man is naturally out of his mind. What will he say to his daughter if things go wrong?"

"They won't go wrong," Chambrun said grimly.

"Fairburn's been sitting tight," Jerry said. "He hasn't moved out of 9D. Room Service brought him breakfast. No phone calls in or out, not a single one."

At a few minutes before nine

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Fairburn, fishbelly pale, turned up. I guessed he hadn't slept at all. I also guessed that he'd managed, somehow, to stay off liquor. Well, he had a delicate situation to handle, and once he'd pulled it off he could afford to drink the well dry.

"Anything?" he asked Chambrun.

"Nothing."

At 9:04 the phone rang. It was the Midland Bank informing Chambrun that the million dollars were on its way. Fifteen minutes later two armed bank guards appeared with the ransom money in a black attaché case. Chambrun signed for it and the guards left. Only seconds later the phone rang again. Chambrun switched on the squawk box so we could all hear.

"Chambrun?" a muffled-sounding voice asked.

"Speaking."

"You have just received the money. Right?"

"Right."

"You will deliver it to Fairburn."

There it was—the order we'd anticipated.

"And—?" Chambrun asked, in a cold flat voice.

"He knows where to bring it. Don't have him followed or the boy will pay for your stupidity."

"Wait!" Fairburn cried out. "Where do I take the money?"

The voice laughed. "No point in playing games any more, Lance. You know where."

"But I don't! What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Bring it here," the voice said, and the phone clicked off.

Fairburn's eyes were wide, glassy-looking. "I tell you I haven't the faintest idea where to take the money!"

"Voice sound familiar to you?" Chambrun asked.

"No!"

"Speaking through a handkerchief or a towel," Jerry said. His black eyes were angry. "So there's your money, Fairburn. You better take it and get out of here. And I wish you luck, all of it bad."

"But *where* do I take it? What do I do with it?" Fairburn was sweating in spite of the air-conditioned coolness of the office. "This is a nightmare."

"You missed your calling, Dad," Jerry said. "You should have been an actor."

Chambrun was staring fixedly at Fairburn. "If you really don't know where to take the money," he said, "I have a suggestion to make."

"What? Please tell me."

"Take the attaché case, go down to the lobby, sit in one of the big chairs. Put the attaché case down beside you without

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hanging onto it. If you're not lying, Fairburn, someone will come and pick it up. Let him take it. And let him leave."

"You think—?"

"I think—if you're not lying—that's what will happen," Chambrun said. "I think he may wait a while to make sure you aren't going to leave the hotel."

"What the hell are you talking about, boss?" Jerry said, his eyes popping. "There's nobody else. We know that."

"Oh, there's somebody else," Chambrun said. I couldn't remember ever seeing him so coldly angry. "Go, Fairburn. Let the pickup man take the attaché case. Don't try to stop him. Now!"

Fairburn, like a man in a trance, took the attaché case and walked out of the office.

"You blown your stack or something, boss?" Jerry said.

"No time to talk," Chambrun said. "Mark, go out onto the mezzanine and watch what happens. Jerry, go down to the lobby and watch. If someone takes the case let him get a little away from Fairburn, then nab him. We don't have any authority outside the hotel, so don't let him get past you. Take him for theft."

"But won't that put the boy behind the eight ball?" Jerry asked.

"I hope not," Chambrun said. "Now get moving, both of you, or we'll blow the whole ball game."

The mezzanine is a balcony that runs around the lobby at what would be the second-floor level. There was a door to it just outside Chambrun's office. I went out onto the balcony and stood looking down at the busy lobby. After a moment or two I saw Fairburn come out of one of the elevators and move uncertainly toward the center of things, looking around for an empty chair. He found one and sat down. He put the attaché case on the floor beside him. He sat back in the chair, gripping the arms.

Nothing happened. Five minutes went by. Ten. I was straining to see if someone in the lobby was watching Fairburn. I couldn't spot anyone who looked in the least suspicious.

And then, when I had convinced myself that whatever Chambrun expected to happen wasn't going to, a man came through the revolving door from the side-street entrance. He was a small dark man wearing a black felt hat with the brim pulled down. He was wearing gloves. He stopped just inside the door and looked around. He saw Fairburn. He kept staring at him for a few

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moments, then appeared to be looking around the lobby, trying to guess if there was some kind of trap. Then he walked briskly past Fairburn who paid no attention to him, turned, came slowly back. Almost without stopping he bent down and picked up the attaché case.

He had gone about five steps with it when he found himself facing Jerry Dodd. I couldn't hear what was said, of course, but the man made a quick move to get by. But Jerry quickly had him by the arm. The man dropped the attaché case, there was a momentary tussle, then I saw a gun in the man's hand.

I shouted to Jerry, but I doubt if he heard me. He didn't need to. Jerry can handle himself. I saw the gun spin away across the marble floor, and Jerry's hand came down in a chopping blow on the man's neck. The man went down as if he'd been hit by a sledgehammer.

I ran back along the balcony and down the stairs to the lobby. I was just in time to see the man being helped by Jerry and Johnny Thacker, the bell captain, into the office behind the front desk. It had all happened so quickly I think most of the people in the lobby thought the man had taken ill.

Fairburn still sat, rigidly straight, in the lobby chair. When he saw me he got up unsteadily and followed me into the office.

Chambrun was there, his eyes buried cold and deep in their pouches. Jerry and Johnny had put the man down in an armchair. He was coming to, touching his neck in a gingerly fashion.

"Search him," Chambrun said. "I'm particularly interested in a room key."

Jerry, looking as though he thought Chambrun was out of his mind, went through the man's pockets. He came up with a room key—the tag attached showed it was for Room 912, on the same floor as the suite that had been reserved for Fairburn.

"Call the police, Jerry," Chambrun said. "Have this man held for theft of the attaché case. Have the case locked up in the office safe." He turned to Fairburn. "My apologies for not having believed you, Mr. Fairburn."

Fairburn moistened his lips. "Bobby?" he said.

"He is, I hope, in Room 912," Chambrun said. "Mark, I'll need you as a witness. And Bobby will need you, Fairburn."

Chambrun didn't say anything more. We went out to the elevators and took a car up to

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the ninth floor. Outside the door Chambrun hesitated, then he put the key we'd taken from the bag snatcher into the lock and opened the door. Standing across the room from us was Bobby. Fairburn started toward his son, but the boy turned away, his face working. Fairburn looked at us helplessly, then he said, "Are you all right, Bobby?"

Bobby nodded his head, but he still didn't speak.

"Whatever they told you, Bobby," Chambrun said, very quietly, "isn't true. Your father never planned to kidnap you and rob your grandfather. That's what they told you, isn't it, boy? You were to stay here until they proved your father's guilt? Is that the way it was?"

"Bobby, before God—" Fairburn said. He was at the boy's side, kneeling beside him. "Bobby, Bobby!"

"I thought you were coming to work things out," the boy said.

"I was, Bobby! I did come here for that."

"But you didn't come. You—"

He stopped because there was the sound of a key being turned in the door. It opened and a huge gray-haired man in a tweed suit burst into the room.

"Bobby!" he cried out. He reached Fairburn and pushed him roughly aside. He put his arms around the boy and held him close. Then he turned to Chambrun. "You caught him at it, Chambrun! Good work. I don't know how you managed, but I'll be indebted to you for the rest of my life. Have you called the police?"

"Not yet," Chambrun said. "It may not be a police matter unless your daughter chooses to bring charges, McRae."

So this was Alistair McRae.

"Jennifer will bring charges," McRae said. "And if she decides to go soft on this devil again, I promise I'll bring charges."

"That would be rather a unique situation," Chambrun said, "a man bringing charges against himself."

McRae's bushy black eyebrows drew together. "What are you talking about, Chambrun?"

"How did you happen to get to this room?" Chambrun asked.

"There was a message for me when I arrived from London," McRae said. "A letter with this room key in it. The letter said I would find Bobby here after ten o'clock."

"You have that letter with you?"

"I was too anxious to get here. I just took the key and rushed here."

Chambrun drew a deep

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breath. "Your kind of wealth and your kind of power can be used ruthlessly, McRae," he said. "You can buy anything you want. I tried to call you in the middle of the night because I half believed Fairburn's story. Your confidential secretary in London told me you weren't there and she didn't know where you were. So I tried to check with Overseas Operator Number Eight to find out where your call to me earlier had come from. There is no Operator Number Eight. Did you bribe one of your secretaries to impersonate an overseas operator, just the way you bribed that poor fool we have downstairs who was supposed to collect the money from Fairburn and return it to you?"

McRae let go of the boy and stood up, straight and tall.

"Fairburn claimed he was bumped off his plane on the coast to make room for some VIP. We checked. Mark got the report that no such incident had taken place. So I decided that Fairburn was lying—until I looked at the Northern International flight schedule that Mark brought me. It seems, McRae, that you are chairman of Northern International's Board of Directors. So it was no problem for you to have Fairburn bumped off his plane. I suppose you explained to the airline people that there was some supersecret government business involved and that they should falsify their report if anyone inquired about the bumping. With your wealth and your power anything can be accomplished—almost anything."

"Oh, God!" Fairburn said.

"Then you overplayed your hand when you made the phone call instructing us what to do with the money," Chambrun said. "You were too eager to involve Fairburn. 'No point in playing games any more, Lance. You know where to bring the money.' The one thing Fairburn didn't need to pull this off, McRae, was a confederate, someone with whom he'd have to share the money and who'd have something on him for the rest of his life. You overplayed, McRae. You overconvinced me. That's when I started putting the pieces together."

"You'll need proof of this fairy tale," McRae said.

"I don't need to prove it legally," Chambrun said. "When I tell Jennifer what's happened here she'll believe me—because she knows you, McRae. Because she knows you hate Fairburn so much you'd do anything on earth to keep him from getting together with her and Bobby again. Because she knows that when you want something no

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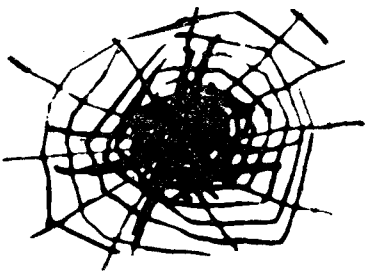
ethical or moral considerations stand in your way. If she wants to bring a legal action against you I'll provide her with the proof she needs, but I think she'll just want you to let her and her husband and her son alone. And she's got enough on you now to make it stick."

The big gray man seemed to shrink inside his clothes. I was dumfounded to see two great tears run down his weathered face.

Chambrun turned to Bobby. "It's a curious thing, Bobby, but whatever your grandfather did was done because he loves your mother so very much and because he loves you. His difficulty is that he also hates too much, that he has no compassion for other people's problems. Maybe he'll find some way to make this up to you and your father. Meanwhile, I think your mother would like it if you and your father tried to start your visit together over again."

The boy looked at Lance Fairburn, and then he held out his hand.

Chambrun turned to me. "All right, Mark," he said. "We're already half a day behind in the business of running a hotel."



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a *NEW* parody-pastiche by

JON L. BREEN

So far as we know, this is the first parody-pastiche written about characters created by Hugh Pentecost, and it's a double-edged double-header. Meet Henri Champoux (p-p version of Pierre Chambrun) and Job Joshua (p-p version of John Jericho), matching wits and personalities in the Hotel Bellweather (p-p version of the Hotel Beaumont), with the parody painted in broad strokes and the pastiche penciled in subtle touches . . . The BAH were holding their annual banquet and costume ball, and one of the courses on the menu was mutton soup à la L.B.

Jon L. Breen scores again!

CHAMPOUX VERSUS JOSHUA

by JON L. BREEN

"For the last time," Henri Champoux barked into the telephone, "I will not have my hotel turned into a shooting gallery!"

As he slammed down the telephone he looked up to see me enter his plush office, a tasteful combination of the exotic and the mundane. As resident manager of the Hotel Bellweather, the world's largest and finest luxury hotel, Champoux must deal with many problems and many people simultaneously, but he prides himself on always knowing what's going on in his hotel. He gave me a curt nod.

"They're at it again, Mart," he said, his black eyes flashing. "I'd have thought the shooting-gallery business was somewhat less prosperous than the incessant offers of these entrepreneurs would suggest. I have just been offered three million dollars to leave the Bellweather, on the theory that since this place couldn't run without me the owners would instantly sell out to the shooting-gallery

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interests. But there are more pressing matters at hand. Mart, you know Mr. Douglas Gooder?"

"Of course I do," I said, shaking hands with a crew-cut, athletic-looking man in his early fifties. Naturally I knew Doug Gooder—he was the chairman of BAH (Bleeding American Hearts), the philanthropic organization that was having its annual banquet and costume ball in the Bellweather that evening. As director of public relations for the hotel, I had seen a lot of Gooder in the past few days.

"There are some problems about the menu for this evening's banquet, Mart," Champoux said.

"That's unfortunate," I said. "But not really my department, is it?"

"I'd like to know just whose department it is," Champoux said, through clenched teeth, keeping his anger in check. "Usually the banquet menu is left to the hotel staff, but I have just heard from the kitchen that representatives of BAH are demanding that mutton soup be part of the bill of fare for this evening's banquet. I have asked Mr. Gooder who ordered the mutton soup and he is unable to enlighten me."

"I don't know," Doug Gooder said. "As I hope you'll understand, gentlemen, the members of the BAH board are all very rich, and some are very eccentric. Any of them could have ordered the mutton soup on BAH stationery, using my signature stamp. I would hate to offend one of them by denying him a dish that was a particular favorite. Of course, if your kitchens are incapable of preparing mutton soup—"

"The kitchens of the Bellweather can prepare anything," Champoux snapped. "The very thought of mutton soup makes my head chef ill, but if it's mutton soup you want, it's mutton soup you'll get. We may not agree with what you eat, but we will defend to the death your right to eat it. But doesn't mutton soup have a certain special significance, Mart?"

I thought about it. "I don't know, sir. It's not one of my favorite dishes, but I don't know of any special significance."

The prodigious bags under Champoux's eyes equipped him well to look disdainful. But he merely said, "Perhaps my fears on that score are groundless. Nonetheless, I've instructed the security force to watch very closely anyone who appears at tonight's costume ball carrying an ax. There is another matter that is more likely to be serious."

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While I was puzzling over what an ax had to do with mutton soup, Champoux passed me a scrap of paper on which the following message was written in undistinctive block capitals: DEATH TO THE LAST OF THE TRIBE.

"Does that mean anything to you, Mart?"

"It looks like a threat, sir."

"Marvelous!" Champoux was at his most sarcastic today. "Any idea at whom the threat could be directed?"

"Well, it could be directed at someone who'll be at the ball tonight. Perhaps someone who will come dressed as an American Indian."

"Do you know of anyone who will come dressed as an American Indian tonight?" Champoux asked Doug Gooder.

"No, not offhand. But most of the costumes will be a surprise. I only know what a few people will be wearing. The artist Job Joshua will come as Paul Bunyan—"

"Paul Bunyan!"

"Yes."

"Paul Bunyan always carries an ax, doesn't he?"

"Well, he was a woodsman. Yes, I guess he does."

"Mart, tell security I want all American Indians watched; I want all axes and all exits watched; and I would appreciate seeing this Job Joshua in my office as soon as he appears in the hotel. What do you know about him, by the way?"

"He was written up in *Life* magazine recently, Chief. He's apparently quite a controversial figure in the world of art. Some say he's too didactic, but others point to his wild use of color and—"

"Enough art criticism. Will he be hard to spot in a crowd?"

"No, they say he's six-six and weighs two hundred and seventy-five pounds."

"Then even you should be able to find him," Champoux said, grimacing.

"Mr. Champoux," said Doug Gooder, "there's one other possibility about the meaning of the term 'last of the tribe'."

"Yes?"

"My son, Doug, Junior. He is a believer in Zero Population Growth and has vowed to have no children. I have no other sons, and my brothers have no heirs. Thus, my son could be the last of the Gooders—the last of the tribe, so to speak."

Job Joshua was a giant of a man, broad and beefy and red-bearded. He entered the lobby of the Bellweather in the costume of a woodsman, with a red-checkered shirt and high boots and an ax slung across his shoulder. As he entered, all eyes in the room turned to look at

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him. He was used to that and had come to expect it. Tonight he felt the Paul Bunyan costume somehow reduced his stature. Only friendship with a female member of the BAH ball committee had made him agree to attend the costume party at all.

He passed a long-haired youth and his vapid-looking girl friend in the lobby. Since they were wearing the scanty loincloths of Tarzan and Jane, yet hadn't been rejected, he deduced that they, too, were guests at the ball. As he passed he heard the young man, a notably scrawny Tarzan, say, "He isn't really larger than life . . ." The rest was lost, but Job Joshua had heard enough. He cursed to himself. He'd disappointed them because of this ridiculous Paul Bunyan costume. The greatest artist in America shouldn't be making a fool of himself this way.

In Champoux's office I witnessed a battle of giants.

"It's me they're really after, you know," said Job Joshua.

"It is?" said Champoux, raising a black eyebrow. I guess he thought Joshua, with his ax, looked more like a threat than a victim.

"I am the last of the tribe," said Joshua simply. "The last individual. I say what I think and paint what I think. I ask no quarter and give none."

"There's the matter of the mutton soup, Mr. Joshua. Do you know why I associate that with axes?"

"Sure," said Joshua. "Lizzie Borden. That was what they had for breakfast in the Borden household the day her parents were chopped up. Cold mutton soup."

"It was hot mutton soup and I think the housekeeper did it," said Champoux. "But that's beside the point. There's death in the air here. Someone on the BAH board—we haven't been able to find out who—ordered mutton soup for tonight's banquet. And there is also this death threat."

"One of my best paintings —it won a prize last year—was called 'Lizzie Borden'," Joshua said. "It was one of my most eloquent statements against violence. The painting symbolizes how children kill their parents in our society and how the parents kill them back."

"It doesn't sound very subtle."

"Subtlety is not my bag, man. I paint to please myself, not some mealy-mouthed critic. But I am so nonviolent that everywhere I turn, people want to do violence to me. I'm glad I've got this woodsman's ax for self-protection tonight."

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There were other problems in the Bellweather that day, among them a call from a Scandinavian sea captain who claimed one of his sailors, a man named Sorensen, had jumped ship, telling a shipmate he was headed for the Bellweather. Given the man's description and probable low financial status, it seemed unlikely. There were also the usual ledge-walkers talking suicide, Peeping Toms reported prowling among the penthouses, and the other day-to-day problems of a great hotel, but none as worrisome as the "affair of the mutton soup."

I spent part of the day looking into the members of the BAH board. They were an odd lot: Mrs. Ambledon Finch, the eccentric multi-millionaire mongrel-breeder; Sime Grantland, the crusading Broadway gossip columnist; Whitney Organdy, the art critic; and Dave Slush, the TV personality. I couldn't see why any of them should have it in for young Gooder. Critic Whitney Organdy was an outspoken foe of Job Joshua's art of social conscience, but that seemed more a motive for Joshua killing the critic than the reverse.

No American Indians were in evidence when the costumed guests began streaming into the ballroom that evening.

The closest thing there was a rather undersized Tarzan—Doug Gooder, Jr. The girl with him, as Jane, had my favorite costume for the evening, not for the intrinsic merit of the costume, but for what it failed to cover.

The banquet part of the evening went smoothly enough. The mutton soup, in fact, was not bad at all. Like Champoux and the members of the Bellweather security staff, I spent a lot of my time looking around at the various guests, searching for axes. But I saw none. Surely members of the board had no more opportunity to conceal such a weapon than did Tarzan and Jane.

Doug Gooder, Sr., apparently trying to win points with his son, came as Bob Dylan; Mrs. Finch came as a St. Bernard; Sime Grantland as a circus strongman; Whitney Organdy as Esther Williams; and Dave Slush as Uriah Heep. The nervous security men had asked Joshua to check his ax, but Joshua refused, though he promised to keep a tight hold on it.

After the banquet I stood in a corner of the Grand Ballroom, trying to keep as many of the principals in sight as I could. Dressed as an ostrich, I was fairly inconspicuous. At certain

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moments I was able to conceal myself from view by sticking my head into the punchbowl.

An ostrich costume makes drinking difficult, so I was perhaps the only sober person in the room when one of the security men rushed over to tell me that a dead man had been found in the men's room.

It proved to be Doug Gooder, Sr., and he had been hacked to death with an ax.

Henri Champoux was livid. "Why was this allowed to happen, Mart?" he demanded.

"I was watching all of them, Chief."

"You obviously weren't watching Gooder."

"Well, I couldn't watch them all at once."

"Where is Joshua?"

"He disappeared during the evening with young Gooder's girl friend."

Job Joshua awoke in a laundry closet with a crushing headache. His head throbbed as only a mighty artist's head could. But he took action immediately, as his war and peace experiences had taught him to do. He raised his ax and hacked down the door of the closet. Even the nonviolent can get angry, and Job Joshua was angry enough to hack to bits a whole forest.

That girl. Young Gooder's girl. She'd said she was in trouble, had persuaded him to follow her and help her. He was always willing, eager even, to help someone in trouble, especially a young woman. But he'd been ambushed as soon as he'd cleared the crowd in the ballroom.

Storming into the ballroom, he was greeted by a hush, and then by female screams.

"That's him!" someone screamed. "That's the one I saw coming out of the men's room!"

Quickly surrounded by police and security men, Joshua looked down at his ax for the first time.

It was covered with blood.

"I can at least be thankful," said Henri Champoux in his office, "that my hotel has not been turned into a shooting gallery. A gory bullring perhaps, but not a shooting gallery."

I sat in silence, still amazed by the escape of Joshua. We were awaiting the hospital report on the wounded. Job had swung his ax like a madman and escaped from the hotel despite the efforts of a hundred of New York's finest.

"He can't get far," Champoux said philosophically. "A man in a Paul Bunyan suit really stands out in a crowd. They'll bring him in."

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The members of the BAH Board of Directors were present at the sad post-mortem, but without their chairman they seemed rudderless.

After a moment's silence Champoux asked tentatively, "Will this unfortunate evening adversely affect the Bellweather's chances when the time comes to select next year's site? You can hardly think the Bellweather is at fault."

"There must be something about this place," Sime Grantland reflected. "Thirty-five murders since 1960."

Champoux did not dignify that with an answer. He merely said, "These are the black days."

Behind him his office window shattered and two struggling figures fell into the room.

I could only gape. Two Paul Bunyans! Two axes! Two Job Joshuas in mortal combat!

Only one rose, his ax triumphant.

"That's marvelous!" cried Dave Slush. "That's just fantastic! What's your definition of love?"

As Job Joshua explained, Henri Champoux sat in stony silence, embarrassed at seeing someone else solve a murder in his very office.

"That man lying on the floor is named Sven Sorensen. He's a Scandinavian sailor. He was hired to impersonate me and hack up Doug Gooder tonight. He was hired by Doug Gooder, Junior, whom I have delivered into the custody of the New York police. Doug Gooder's girl friend was used as a decoy, to lure me away from the ball—not with her natural charms, I might add, but with a spurious plea for help.

"I was knocked unconscious and locked in a laundry closet while Sorensen committed the crime, and then the bloody ax was thrown in there with me, substituted for my own. A clever frameup. The mutton soup was another factor that was supposed to throw suspicion on me, because of my Lizzie Borden painting.

"I should have known when I first saw young Gooder and his girl friend in the lobby. They were discussing me. They wanted to be sure that the impersonator they chose matched me physically. When I heard young Gooder say, 'He isn't really larger than life,' I didn't hear the whole sentence. What he meant was that I'm not physically larger than *Life* magazine said I am in that write-up they did on me a few weeks ago. They were getting jittery—afraid the sailor they hired might be too small for the job. Physically, he wasn't, but

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mentally and spiritually he didn't measure up. Or artistically, I might add. I should have caught onto this at once, since as you all can see I *am* larger than life in the true sense.

"Young Gooder killed him for the inheritance, of course. But in a deeper sense Doug Gooder, Senior, committed suicide. He caused his own death by disillusioning his son with the corrupted values of the older generation. I personally think Junior should be given another chance. The two broken arms and legs I gave him tonight should be punishment enough.

"Now if you gentlemen will excuse me, I will go back to Greenwich Village and paint. All this naked violence has made me a little sick."

Champoux sat on in silence, but I saw a loose end.

"What about the note that said DEATH TO THE LAST OF THE TRIBE? What did that mean? What tribe was Gooder the last of?"

Joshua stared hard at Champoux, then said, "Maybe you'd like to explain that one, Champoux. Or should I?"

Champoux said nothing.

Joshua turned to me. "Be careful. That's all I can tell you. You're the last of the tribe."

"I am?" I gaped. "The last of what tribe?"

"The Watson Tribe. Guys like me and Champoux who attract murder and other crimes sometimes have other guys following us around, writing down everything we say, and expressing wonder and amazement at our most elementary deductions. It can get to be a real drag after a while. I have a Watson, too, but I lose mine every chance I get. The business of being a larger-than-life superman is a loner's game. You, sir, are the last one left. The last Watson. Or near enough.

"I don't know who the author of that threat is, but it may be one Henri Champoux. Watch your step. If you need any help, just ask for me around the Village. I can usually be found painting my heart out against violence."

Job Joshua picked up his ax and strutted out into the night.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Jericho story by
HUGH PENTECOST

The second half of the Pentecost sandwich . . . John Jericho, that red-bearded, red-haired Viking of a man, devotes his life and enormous energies to painting and fighting—painting to reveal the senseless violence in the world, fighting to help the underdog, the oppressed, the "little people" of the world. Wherever Jericho goes, he meets or is met by crime. Usually there is a mystery to be solved; this time there's something more—an impossible mystery to be solved. Not a locked-room puzzle or a gimmicked miracle problem—nothing like that. Here he has to solve the faith of a woman who knows, despite the overwhelming evidence against her faith, that her man could not have done what he was supposed to have done . . .

JERICHO PLAYS IT COOL

by HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho, the crusading artist, is not often to be found in his studio on Jefferson Mews in New York's Greenwich Village. He uses the studio largely as a storage place for paintings, materials, and clothes. Most of his time is spent traveling around the world painting, almost invariably scenes of violence, in a personal outcry against man's inhumanity to man.

Jericho is a huge man, standing almost six feet four inches tall and weighing 240 pounds, of solid bone and muscle. His hair and beard are a flaming red, and he reminds one of an old Viking warrior. His life has been devoted to exposing injustice and fighting for the little man in a world where power structures and special privileges ignore individual rights and freedoms.

This may explain how Jericho became involved in the death of Jimmy Kane. It was partly accidental because Jeri-

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cho was spending a rare few days in the Jefferson Mews studio. If he had been away he would never have met the girl, and if he hadn't met her he would have read about Jimmy Kane's death, been distressed by it, and filed away his memories of Jimmy in the category of human tragedies. The suicide of a young man is sad, tragic, but there is nothing you can do about it after the fact.

Jimmy Kane had grown up in the Village area of the city, only a few blocks from Jefferson Mews. He had faced all the problems of poverty while trying to survive in a huge city. By the time he reached high school Jimmy had become a fine athlete, starring in football and basketball. His special talent, however, was boxing. Before he was 20 he had been taken on by a professional manager, had fought a dozen fights in the small-club circuit, and begun to gain a reputation by knocking out a few seasoned professionals on the fringe of the big time.

He was beginning to earn good money when Jake Slattery, the number one challenger for the heavyweight crown, inadvisedly agreed to fight Kane in what was advertised as a warm-up for Slattery prior to his fight with the champion. Jimmy cut Slattery to pieces and was suddenly a headline maker. The champion was reluctant to face this new challenger, using the excuse that Jimmy was still not well enough known to attract the big money of a Madison Square Garden fight and closed-circuit TV. Jimmy proceeded to rectify this situation by knocking out two other top-ranked contenders.

But the end to his big dream came about in a most unlikely fashion. Jimmy was working out with a sparring partner in a neighborhood gym when he slipped on a wet spot in the ring, fell, and struck his head against a ring post. The result was a skull fracture and partial paralysis. His fighting career was over—*snap*, just like that.

Jericho had had a brief contact with Jimmy while Kane was still on his way up. He had seen him fight, been fascinated by his physical perfection, his amazing reflexes. He had drawn some sketches and shown them to Jimmy in his dressing room. The young fighter had been pleased and flattered. He had come around to the Mews to look at some of Jericho's paintings. He was, Jericho thought, a bright, intelligent, warm-hearted young man.

Jericho was out of town when Jimmy had his accident. He read about it. The paralysis had eventually been cured, but Jimmy wasn't able to regain his

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sharp physical skills. His chance for the big money was gone. Somehow he got to taking drugs, ran the whole gamut of self-destruction, and wound up in Lexington, Kentucky, having served several jail sentences for possession of narcotics.

Basically, Jimmy Kane was a gutty guy. At Lexington he kicked the habit. He returned to New York and found a new aim in life—helping others in his own world who had fallen into the drug trap. He was loved and respected for a new reason by the people in his part of town.

The night before Jericho read of Kane's dramatic death, Jimmy had walked into the neighborhood police precinct house. He was known and respected there. He often turned up to ask about kids he was trying to help who might be in trouble with the cops. Patrolman Martin had been at the water cooler and had waved a hello to Jimmy. Sergeant Kohler was standing with his back to Jimmy, bending over a desk to fill out some forms. Suddenly Kohler felt his gun being wrenched out of its holster. He spun around to find himself facing Kane, the gun in Jimmy's hand. Before Kohler could act Jimmy lifted the gun and blew out his own brains.

The newspaper story Jericho read expressed the shock of the community. Jimmy's life story was told—the accident that had ended his career, the resulting deep depression, the drugs. But he had licked the drug habit. People thought he was happy at what he was doing. But evidently it had all been too much for him.

Jericho was sorry. He would find out when and where the funeral would be held and pay his respects to Jimmy. But before he could make those inquiries the girl came to Jefferson Mews.

Jericho answered the door and found himself facing an attractive blonde girl. She had the figure of a fashion model and she was dressed inexpensively but in style. He guessed she was looking for work, posing for him. Word seemed to get around whenever he was in town.

"Mr. Jericho?" she asked. It was a warm low voice.

"Yes." He was aware of a kind of dark tragedy in her blue eyes.

"You are—were—a friend of Jimmy Kane's?"

"Yes, I knew Jimmy. Rotten shame what happened. I read about it in the paper."

"May I come in and talk to you?"

"Of course."

She came in. She looked around at the brilliant paintings

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on the wall. He could have sworn she didn't see them. She took the chair he waved to and sat, gripping the arms so tightly her knuckles showed white.

"Jimmy talked about you," she said. "My name is Marilyn Sims, by the way. So I know you know about such things, Mr. Jericho."

"What things?"

"I don't believe Jimmy shot himself," the girl said.

Jericho felt his eyebrows go up. "My dear child, two men saw him do it," he said. "Two policemen."

"I don't believe he did it," the girl said.

Her lips trembled and her whole body was shaking. She was very close to hysteria, Jericho thought, so he played it cool. "I only know what I read in the paper," he said. "It seemed pretty clear that Jimmy shot himself in front of two reliable witnesses."

"I tell you I don't believe it!"

"Look," Jericho said, "would you like some coffee?" He didn't wait for an answer, but went over to the electric percolator on the sideboard and poured her a cup. "Sugar? Cream?"

She shook her head.

He turned to a large open bookcase that contained stacks of sketchbooks. He selected one and brought it back with the coffee.

"These might interest you," he said.

The book contained the series of sketches he'd made of Jimmy Kane. Some of them were the full figure—Jimmy in action. Some of them were just fragments—studies of his back, the muscles of his shoulders, a fighter's profile, chin tucked in against his chest.

"They're beautiful," she said after a moment, and her voice broke. She looked up at him, her eyes wide. "Would it shock you to know that just two hours before Jimmy is supposed to have shot himself he and I were making love together?"

"Why should it shock me?"

"We've been lovers for nearly six months, Mr. Jericho. For the last two months Jimmy has been pleading with me to marry him."

Jericho smiled. "Why not? It may be an old-fashioned idea, but quite a few people still believe in it."

"Because we both came up out of the bottom," the girl said. "Jimmy was on drugs, with several convictions against him. I—I have served time for shoplifting and—and other crimes. I have a brother who was on drugs. Jimmy helped him—it was through him I met Jimmy. He got me straightened

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out and we fell in love.

"Just two hours before he is supposed to have killed himself I had said 'Yes,' I would marry him. He was very high on happiness, Mr. Jericho, when he left me to go to work. He works—worked—in the drug rehabilitation center, you know. He had to see a couple of kids who were in trouble. We made a date for dinner to make plans for when and where we'd be married. There is no way, absolutely no way, he could have been plunged into such a state of despair that he would kill himself two hours after he left me."

"And yet he did it in front of two witnesses."

"Never!"

Her conviction was very real. She wasn't trying to sell herself something. She was as certain as anyone could be.

"What do you want me to do, Marilyn?" he asked.

"Find out what really happened!"

Slowly Jericho began to fill a charred black pipe from an oilskin pouch. "I can't even guess what happened, Marilyn. I can't imagine what toppled Jimmy from the pinnacle of happiness to suicidal despair. I don't know where to begin. I—"

"You don't believe me!" she said. "I know it couldn't have happened the way they tell it."

Jericho held his lighter to the pipe until he got it well going. "Nothing can bring Jimmy back," he said. "If I dig into this I may come up with answers that are more painful than the way it stands now. His reasons, his motives—"

"He didn't do it!" she said. She stood up, unsteadily. "If you don't believe that, you won't be able to help."

He put his big hand on her shoulder. He could feel her trembling. "I'll do what I can, Marilyn. But I can't promise anything."

Police Captain Swann, who commanded the local precinct, was a decent man. Jericho knew him. Once a few months back there had been some trouble with gang wars in the area. Jericho had involved himself and found Swann to be a tough cop but also a man with compassion for human problems.

"Long time no see," Swann said, when Jericho was admitted to his office.

"I'm out of town a lot, Captain."

"What can I do for you or is this just a social call?"

"I was distressed to hear what happened to Jimmy Kane," Jericho said. "He was a friend."

"Poor guy," Swann said. "It was something hard to believe, Mr. Jericho. He was in and out

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of here all the time, you know. He was doing a great job at this drug rehabilitation center. We tried to cooperate with him—let him know if we saw any of his kids where they oughtn't to be, or hanging around with the wrong people."

"The reason I'm asking about him," Jericho said, "is that I have reason to believe things were all going his way. He was a success at his job. He'd licked the habit himself. He was riding the top of the wave. Why would he do such a thing?"

Swann frowned. "Maybe I can help you there," he said. "There were some facts we decided not to give out to the press, and I think you'll understand why when I tell you."

So there was an answer, Jericho thought.

"Naturally, after it happened," Swann went on, "we searched the body. We found a couple of ounces of heroin on him, a needle, a tourniquet—the whole equipment. We put two and two together, Mr. Jericho. He was hooked again. After two years of private struggling he'd lost his biggest fight. He couldn't face it."

"You say you had a reason for not telling this to the press."

"It wouldn't do any good and it could do a lot of harm," Swann said. "Those kids he worked with. They loved him, trusted him, idolized him. If they knew he'd lost his own fight, a lot of them might throw in the towel."

Jericho drew a deep breath. "That answers a big question for me," he said. "Maybe it's just morbid curiosity, but I'd like to hear from the two men who saw it just how it happened. Possible?"

"Ordinarily they wouldn't be here this time of day," Swann said. "They're on the four o'clock shift. It was less than a half hour after they came on yesterday that it happened. They were pretty shaken up, both of them. I sent 'em home and told 'em to come back this morning to make out a full report. You want to talk to them I'll have them in."

The two cops were in civilian clothes. Sergeant Kohler was a gray-haired veteran with bright blue eyes. Patrolman Martin was young, eager-looking.

"It was the damnedest thing," Martin said. "We'd just come on duty. The sergeant and I were the only ones in the front room. The sergeant was at the desk, his back to the door, and I was over at the water cooler when Jimmy came in."

"He came in often," Kohler said, "just to chew the fat, rap about his kids, you know."

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"I said, 'Hi, Jimmy,' " Martin said. "He said 'Hi!' and walked over toward the sergeant. There didn't seem anything odd about the way he looked or acted."

"I knew he was there because I heard Martin speak to him," Kohler said. "I was busy with the reports the off-duty officer had left me, so I didn't turn around."

"He walked right over to the sergeant," Martin said. "He reached out and pulled the sergeant's gun from its holster. I couldn't believe what I was seeing—except that I guess I thought Jimmy meant it as some kind of a gag."

"I felt the gun go and I spun around," Kohler said. "He'd taken a step or two back from me. I was about to yell at him like what the hell he was doing when he put the gun up to his temple and pulled the trigger."

"I just froze where I was," Martin said. "I couldn't believe what I was seeing."

"He went down, his brains spattered on the floor," Kohler said. "I just couldn't believe it at the time."

"At the time?"

"I told Mr. Jericho what we found on him," Swann said.

"Oh." Kohler looked relieved. "Well, that explains it, I guess. Too bad. He was a good Joe."

Jericho stood very still, a nerve twitching high up on his cheek. "Thanks," he said, in a flat voice. "Thanks for telling me."

Jericho spoke as gently as he could to the blonde girl.

"They found drugs on him, Marilyn—heroin, needle, the works."

She looked at Jericho steadily. They were in her small apartment on Jane Street. "So?" she said.

"He was evidently back on the stuff, Marilyn. Perhaps he was high on that as well as on happiness when he left you. When it wore off—" Jericho shrugged. "He knew he couldn't make it. He knew he'd destroy your life as well as his own."

"That, Mr. Jericho, is utter nonsense," the girl said. "Jimmy was clean for almost two years. I can swear to that."

"Then how do you account for what they found on him?"

"He took it from somebody else, from one of his kids. He just happened to have it on him when they killed him."

"When who killed him?"

"That's what I hoped you'd find out."

Jericho sighed. "What a wife you'd have made, Marilyn. A woman who believes in her man the way you do—"

"We should be able to find

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out about the stuff," Marilyn said. "The boys at the Center might know if he took it from one of the kids."

"Let's try," Jericho said. Something was bothering him, something was itching at him. He was, he realized, beginning to believe the impossible.

The Drug Rehabilitation Center was located in the basement of an old church. There were Ping-Pong tables, dart boards, and other games. It was like a club for boys. Marilyn was evidently well known to the boys. She had worked there with Jimmy in her free time. They crowded around her, shy of Jericho at first.

Here Marilyn had real allies. She was flooded by variations of the same question: "What really happened to Jimmy?" Mr. Jericho was helping to find out, she told them. One thing he needed to clear up. The police had found drugs and a needle and other equipment on Jimmy and they assumed he was back on the stuff.

"Oh, way out, man!"

"No way! Not Jimmy."

"Then where did he get the stuff he had on him?" Jericho asked.

"Took it from Teddy Washington," a boy said. "Teddy had it on him yesterday afternoon when Jimmy come in here. Jimmy took it off him."

"Teddy tell him where he got it?" Jericho asked.

"No way, man. You squeal on the pusher and the big shots who supply the pusher don't like it. They fix you good and that way they make it clear to everyone else. Jimmy wouldn't even ask Teddy because he'd know Teddy couldn't tell him."

Jericho nodded. He was beginning to believe, but there was still a small doubt. These kids would stand back of Jimmy, would lie for Jimmy. If Jimmy had slipped and was back on the stuff they'd deny it forever. But there was a way to make sure.

Jericho went to the pay phone in the far corner of the room, dropped in a dime, and called a number. The man he eventually got on the other end was Lieutenant Pascal of the Homicide Squad, an old friend.

"Not working these days, Lieutenant?" Jericho asked.

"There are so many murders these days, Johnny, I've thrown in my hand. I just sit here doing *The Times*' crossword puzzle."

"Is the puzzle too engrossing for you to do me a favor?"

"Name it."

"A fellow named Jimmy Kane committed suicide in a police station yesterday."

"I read about it. Friend of yours?"

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"Friend of mine," Jericho said. "How tough would it be for you to get the Medical Examiner's report?"

"Like a phone call," Pascal said. "What do you want to know?"

"Was he on drugs? Were there signs of it in his system? Were there any recent needle marks on him?"

"You got another dime?" Pascal said. "It shouldn't take me longer than that. Hold on."

Jericho held on. The operator asked for another dime and he fed the machine. Then Pascal came back.

"Your boy was clean," he said. "Nothing in the blood. No needle marks. Some very old scars. He was on the stuff some years ago, you know. But clean right now."

Jericho frowned. "Wouldn't Captain Swann, who was in charge of the case, know that?"

"Not unless he had a reason to inquire," Pascal said. "It isn't in the report, Johnny. I found out by asking because you wanted to know. The M.E.'s report doesn't say what they don't find. Man died of a gunshot wound in the right temple, close enough to be a suicide. It doesn't say that your friend didn't have stomach trouble or didn't have diabetes or wasn't on drugs. It only reports what they did find."

"Thanks, Lieutenant."

"Hey, wait a minute. I have a normal amount of curiosity, you know."

"I may have work for you," Jericho said.

"How do you mean?"

"I think Jimmy Kane was murdered," Jericho said.

"But two cops saw what happened!"

"I know they did," Jericho said. "See you around."

He went back to Marilyn and the waiting boys. He smiled at the girl. "The Medical Examiner says Jimmy was clean—no drugs, no new needle marks."

"I didn't need him to tell me," Marilyn said.

Jericho looked around at the faces of the boys. "How many of you know Sergeant Kohler and Patrolman Martin at the precinct house by sight?"

Four hands went up.

"I'd like to ask a favor. Kohler and Martin are on the four o'clock shift, which means they get off at midnight. Could you guys watch them for me when they leave? They may go somewhere together, they may go separately. I want you to see where they go and phone me. Can do?"

"No sweat, man."

"So they'll go home," Marilyn said.

"Not when I get through with them," Jericho said.

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Jericho had the capacity to turn to work when he wanted to shut out other problems. Most of the rest of that day and the early part of the evening he stood before the easel in his studio, painting. The case of Jimmy Kane was apparently erased from his consciousness. But at exactly 9:30 in the evening he put down his brushes, undressed, took a steaming hot shower, and then put on fresh clothes—dark-gray slacks, a black turtlenecked knit shirt, a tan corduroy jacket.

It was ten o'clock when he picked up the phone. He had taken his handkerchief out of his pocket and he held it, crumpled, over the mouthpiece of the phone as he dialed.

"I'd like to speak to Sergeant Kohler," he said, when there was an answer.

"Kohler here," Kohler said when he came on, brisk and efficient.

"I want to talk to you about Jimmy Kane," Jericho said.

"You better take the hot potato out of your mouth," Kohler said. "You're not coming over clear."

"Clear enough," Jericho said. "You see, Kohler, I know exactly what happened to Jimmy Kane. I figure it ought to be worth five thousand bucks to you and Martin for me to keep quiet about it."

Kohler's voice was suddenly tense. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'll give you till morning to get up the bread," Jericho said. "I'll call you again so we can figure out how you get it to me."

"Now listen, Mac, I don't know who you are or what you think you know, but I'll tell you one thing. I don't have—"

Jericho put down the receiver. He smoothed out his handkerchief and put it back in his pocket. He went about the business of making himself three eggs, toast, and coffee. After he'd finished eating he sat in a big armchair, a sketch pad in his lap, playing games with a pencil.

Time moved slowly. About fifteen minutes past midnight his phone rang.

"Mr. Jericho? About those two cops."

"Yes?"

"They went straight from the precinct house to Guardine's Bar and Grill. It's about two blocks from—"

"I know the place," Jericho said.

"Well, that's where they're at, Mr. Jericho."

"Thanks, son."

"No sweat, man."

"I'll see you around."

"Count on it, man."

Jericho turned out the stu-

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dio lights and went out. He walked out of the Mews and turned south. Guardine's was only a short distance away. Guardine's was a steakhouse and bar, not frequented by high society but not cheap. At this time of night the dinner business was over. A few male customers were at the bar and some of the booths along the west wall were occupied by men and women.

In the farthest booth from the door Jericho spotted Kohler and Martin sitting with a sleekly groomed man who was talking to them earnestly. The two policemen were in civilian clothes. Jericho's mouth hardened, then he sauntered over to the booth. Martin and the sleek man were sitting together on one side of the table. The gray-haired Kohler was facing them.

Jericho stopped by the booth. "Hello, Sergeant," he said.

Kohler jerked his head around and forced a smile. "Hi, Mr. Jericho. This a watering place of yours?"

"I just dropped in," Jericho said. "Hello, Martin."

Martin nodded. "This is Bill Guardine who owns the joint," Martin said.

Guardine's dark eyes glittered. "Hi," he said.

"Ah, yes," Jericho said. "Guardine. Move over, Kohler, I'll buy a round of drinks."

"Look, Mr. Jericho," Kohler said, "we've got a little business to transact, so if we could have a rain check—?"

"I have a little business to transact, too," Jericho said, "and I imagine it's connected with yours. I decided not to wait till morning to work out the way you'll get the money to me." He moved in and sat down next to Kohler, facing Guardine.

Kohler moistened his lips. "You were the one who called me?"

"The hot potato was a handkerchief held over the mouthpiece," Jericho said. He smiled, a cold smile, at Guardine. "You going to put up the money for the boys, Guardine?"

"You blown your mind or something?" Guardine asked. His narrowed eyes moved out toward the bar, looking for someone or something.

"I don't think the price is too high," Jericho said. "You don't pay and my friends here, Kohler and Martin, will get the business. With the heat properly applied I suspect they'll talk, which means that in the end you and your pushers will get the business."

"What is it you think you know?" Guardine asked.

"I know how Jimmy Kane died and why," Jericho said.

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"Jimmy was a smart boy. He had something like his own police force—about three dozen desperate kids who would do anything in the world for him. I imagine he set a trap for you guys and he came to you with the evidence—heroin, needle, the rest of it. He'd found out you two noble bluecoats were protecting the pushers on the street. He faced you with it and you knew he had you cold. You, Kohler, and Martin, just happened to be alone and you did the one thing you could to save your miserable corrupt hides. You pulled your gun, Kohler, and you shot Jimmy in the head. All so smooth, so slick, and whatever Jimmy knew about you died with him."

"You're dreaming, Jericho," Kohler said. His face had gone a pasty white and he was sweating.

"I figured you weren't being paid off by the pushers on the street," Jericho said, "so I thought I'd find out who was the Big Man. So I phoned you and you led me here." He smiled at Guardine. "So you turn out to be the Big Man, Dad."

"And you expect to get paid off with nothing but a dream in your head?" Guardine asked.

"I'll let you in on a secret," Jericho said, smiling and smiling. "I really don't want the money. I just wanted to get led to you and it worked. I may not have evidence in my hands, but I can make enough noise so that honest men will find the evidence and pin it on you."

Guardine had been sitting with his hands in his lap. He moved slightly, then he spoke in a very low voice.

"Pointing at your belly button under the table, Jericho, is a gun with a silencer on it. I suggest we talk about this in my office."

"I like it here with witnesses around," Jericho said.

"Let me tell you something, wise guy," Guardine said. "There isn't a person in this place who will see anything that happens, and if they do see something they won't remember what it was. So start moving."

Jericho still smiled. "You don't give me much choice, do you, Big Man?"

Jericho suddenly moved. Under the table he kicked out savagely. There was the faint sound of a silenced shot and Kohler screamed. The bullet had shattered his kneecap. At the same moment Jericho stood up and the table went over against Guardine and Martin, pinning them in the booth.

Jericho reached out, grabbed Guardine by the collar, and

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yanked him out of the booth. His left hand came up against Guardine's jaw in a devastating uppercut so that the gangster sagged in Jericho's collar hold.

Jericho's bright eyes turned to Martin. "Don't reach for your gun, friend, unless you want me to break your neck."

Jericho spun Guardine around and flattened him against the wall. "No witnesses, you said, Guardine. I had a feeling that's the way it would be, so I brought my own. Take a look around."

Guardine turned his head and found himself faced by a semicircle of young faces, white, black, brown. In the center of the group was a lovely blonde girl. Beyond them Guardine saw customers and waiters hurrying out of his place.

"One of you kids call Captain Swann," Jericho said, "and maybe we better have an ambulance for our friend Kohler. He's hurting." He swung Guardine around and literally threw him into the booth with Martin and Kohler. He took a step or two toward the girl. "So we know, Marilyn," he said. "Unfortunately it isn't going to do Jimmy much good."

"But you finished his job for him and left him clean," the girl said. "Thank you for that, Mr. Jericho."

Jericho looked back at the three crumpled men in the booth. "My pleasure," he said.

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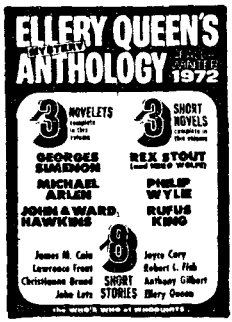

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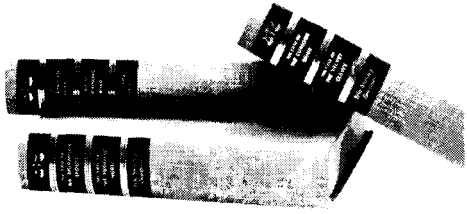

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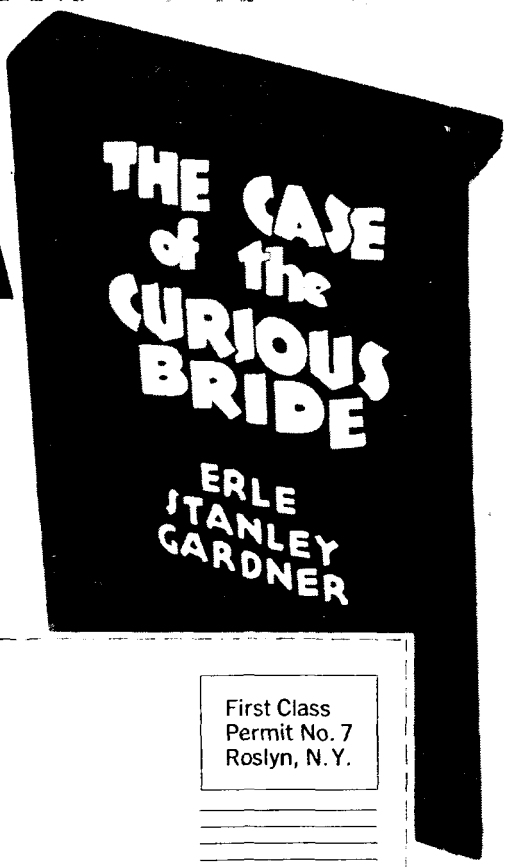

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